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## Guest Commentary

# Supporting school choice

By Denise Perrault

The freedom to make choices is at the core of our country's founding ideals. Choice is especially important when it comes to education.

Insight School of Colorado (ISCO), with the Colorado Coalition of Cyberschool Families, rallied at the state capitol on Feb. 25 to celebrate the freedom to choose an online education in Colorado. However, year-round, we encourage our legislators across the state to continue to support school choice. As executive director of ISCO, I support virtual education as an option for families across the state.

ISCO - an online, diploma-granting high school accredited through the Julesburg School District - personalizes learning to meet individual students' needs and provides a pathway to life after high school. This individualized learning approach succeeds because of its flexibility; taking into account that what is best for one student is not always best for another student.

Due to flexible academic schedules, online learners often take advantage of social and educational opportunities that would not be possible in a traditional classroom setting. For example, one Insight student actually attended President Obama's inauguration, instead of reading about it or watching it on television, and several ISCO students are training to be elite-level athletes and competitive skiers and some are avid volunteers in their communities.

Without the option of having a choice when it comes to K-12 education, some students fall through the cracks and don't have the best learning experience possible for them. Or, worse yet, they drop out of school entirely.

The 2008-2009 school year dropout rate (among students in grades 7-12) for the state of Colorado was 3.6 percent. According to the Alliance for Excellent Education, if the more than 16,500 Class of 2008 dropouts had graduated, Colorado's economy would have seen an additional \$4.3 billion in wages over these students' lifetimes. Online education can be an attractive option for students who otherwise would choose to drop out of traditional schools.

As the school administrator, I come into contact with every parent and student in the school, and I know that most of these students would not be working toward a high school diploma, if it weren't for having been able to choose an online school over a brick-and-mortar school.

Online schools are a good fit for students who may need to work, raise a family, prefer a home schooling atmosphere, live in rural or remote areas, require more time to master certain subjects or want to progress more quickly through coursework. In addition, elite-level athletes, dedicated community volunteers and students whose families farm or ranch find online schooling to be a good fit, especially for the flexibility that allows them to pursue their hobbies and passions.

Our schools work for these students by simultaneously meeting educational requirements and individuals' unique needs, beyond what is possible in a traditional school. I feel that we, the education system, have a moral and ethical responsibility to provide schooling options for these students, regardless of their circumstances.

Though students and their parents choose cyberschools for myriad reasons, the one thing they all have in common is a desire to choose the best educational experience possible. For many across the state of Colorado, this means going to school online, working toward a high school diploma and looking ahead to the future.

No matter whether you and your children choose traditional, online, Montessori, charter, private or home schooling, please advocate that choice remains a choice, and Colorado's families are empowered to make these critical decisions for their children's educations.

*Denise Perrault is executive director of Insight School of Colorado. EDITOR'S NOTE: This is an online-only column and has not been edited.*

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