

EDITORIAL –

End of Denver's school reforms? - We hope the new union-backed majority on Denver's school board won't automatically put a stop to recent progress.

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By adding two new members to the Denver Public Schools board who are backed by the teachers union, voters may have delivered a disheartening blow to the struggling district's nascent yet promising reform efforts.

Their election could create a bloc of four among the board's seven members that won't support the hardfought changes that have made Denver a national model in education reform.

However, no one knows for sure what positions new school board members Andrea Merida and **Nate Easley** will stake out when they take up questions about new charter schools; "innovation schools" that operate outside union rules; and tying teacher assessment to student achievement.

Merida was particularly hostile to charter schools on the campaign trail, but there's hope **Easley** won't be a sure vote against reform. We hope he becomes a board member in the same vein as Jill Conrad,

who was elected with help from the Denver Classroom Teachers Association but was open to reform efforts.

And for the record, we'd very much like to be wrong about the prediction that Superintendent Tom Boasberg could have a rough time mustering support to pursue the vision outlined in the Denver Plan, a meticulously constructed blueprint for improvement.

Even though **Easley** received significant financial support from the teachers union, which is frequently at odds with reform efforts, he is focused on outcomes, not process. In a candidate questionnaire submitted to the Post editorial board, he said charter schools ought to be among the tools in the toolbox that must be seriously considered to improve student outcomes.

He also strongly opposed direct placement of teachers, pejoratively called the "lemon dance," in which teachers who haven't found assignments are foisted upon what are typically the poorest schools in the district. It's a terrible practice, anchored in state teacher tenure laws, that must end.

Easley also signalled an openness to considering closing failing schools and more autonomy for principals.

We hope these seeds of ideas will blossom into a fuller support for the good work already under way at DPS.

A reform-oriented board is not only good for students, but also vital to the state's chances of receiving a coveted Race to the Top grant, potentially worth hundreds of millions of dollars.

U.S. Education Secretary Arne Duncan has said the grants will focus on four reform goals - using data to drive instruction, raising standards, turning around historically low-performing schools, and improving teacher and principal quality.

As Colorado's most high-profile school district, it's important that DPS stay on the reform track - for the good of its students, but also for the rest of the state.

We don't think the DPS board should rubber-stamp whatever Boasberg puts forth without question, but we do hope the new board members give full consideration to supporting the existing reforms that have the potential to transform the district.