

# EDUCATION WEEK

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## School board recall vote in Jefferson County, Colo., targets conservatives

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Tuesday will be the day of reckoning in Jefferson County, Colo., where voters will head to the polls in a recall election that seeks to oust three conservative school board members.

The recall attempt in Colorado's second largest school district has become quite contentious, with allegations of death threats. More than \$1 million is expected to be poured into the race, according to the Washington Post. Libertarian groups like Americans for Prosperity, the organization backed by billionaires Charles and David Koch, are spending to keep the targeted members in place, while the local teachers' union has contributed to those who are pushing the recall.

All five board seats are up for grabs. In addition to the three conservative board members who are being targeted for recall, two more liberal-leaning members decided not to seek reelection.

The scene for the recall was set last fall when the three conservative board members—Ken Witt, Julie Williams, and John Newkirk—attempted to “review” the AP U.S. History curriculum, with a view toward emphasizing patriotism and the positive aspects of U.S. history, while downplaying social strife.

That proposal prompted days of student walk-outs that thrust the district into the national spotlight. Teachers also staged “sick-outs.”

But the AP History flap seemed to be the boiling point for those who had complained that the three board members, who were elected in 2013, had violated state law by holding secret meetings. Recall organizers take issue with the new superintendent's salary, which is higher than his predecessor's, and they also argue that teacher turnover has increased under the new board.

Witt, Williams, and Newkirk have denied holding secret meetings. They say that the superintendent, Dan McMinimee, is being paid in line with what others in similarly-sized districts are making. They point to the change in how local school funds are distributed, giving the same amount of money to charter schools as traditional public schools. They also want to expand school choice.

According to the Associated Press, groups against the recall have spent more than \$186,000, while those in favor of the recall, including teachers' unions, have spent more than \$277,000. The AP cited Colorado Ethics Watch for the numbers.

While they don't garner huge headlines (think of the effort to recall Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker in 2012), school board recalls are not that uncommon.

In a blog post Monday, Joshua Spivak, a senior fellow at the Hugh L. Carey Institute for Government Reform at Wagner College in Staten Island, N.Y., wrote that since 2012, there have been 307 attempted school board recalls. Twenty-four officials have been “kicked out” as a result, 21 officials resigned, and 13 survived, he wrote on his blog, The Recall Elections Blog.

Jeffco school board members are not the only ones fighting for their jobs because of recall efforts, either. Board members in Selma, Calif., Golden Plains, Calif., and Caldwell, Idaho,

are also facing the music tomorrow. Another recall is scheduled for Lucerne, Calif., next year, he wrote.

*[You can read more of Spivak's take on his blog.](#)*