



COLORADO STATE BOARD OF EDUCATION

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December 15, 2010

House and Senate Education Committees
Colorado State Capitol
200 E. Colfax Ave
Denver, CO 80203

Honorable Members of the House and Senate Education Committees:

This letter is submitted pursuant to 22-2-106(1)(b.5) Colorado Revised Statutes, which states:

“(1) It is the duty of the state board: To review and evaluate annually the job performance of the commissioner of education using procedures and criteria determined by the state board. The Procedures and criteria shall include, at a minimum, consideration of the comments and opinions of school district superintendents and school board members regarding the commissioner’s job performance. The state board shall report the results of its evaluation to the education committees of the house of representatives and senate, or any successor committees.”

22-2-110(5) Colorado Revised Statutes further states:

“(5) The state board shall annually review and evaluate the job performance of the commissioner, as provided in section 22-2-106(b.5), and report the results of its evaluation to the public and the education committees of the house of representatives and senate, or any successor committees.”

In June 2010, Commissioner Jones completed his third year of service to Colorado. At the August 11, 2010 State Board meeting, the State Board conducted an evaluation of Commissioner Jones’ third year as Commissioner of Education. In doing so, it utilized the questions it prepared as an evaluation tool last year. These questions were based upon the qualifications the State Board included in the initial 2007 job posting. Additional questions were added last year.

Additionally, pursuant to statute, the State Board sought confidential input from Colorado’s superintendents and local school board members on the commissioner’s performance over the past year. Respondents were asked to choose between “excellent, good, fair, and needs improvement” and were provided an opportunity for additional comments regarding each question or any

Bob Schaffer
Chairman
4th Congressional District

Randy DeHoff
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6th Congressional District

Elaine Gantz Berman
1st Congressional District

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7th Congressional District

Peggy Littleton
5th Congressional District

Marcia Neal
3rd Congressional District

Angelika Schroeder
2nd Congressional District

other comment the recipient wished to submit. The State Board received an increased number of responses this year over last year: it received 146 responses compared to 122 last year. Of those who responded, 56% were superintendents and 44% were school board members. The majority of responses came from rural Colorado (77%) and the remaining 23% came from primarily urban areas. As in the last two years of the State Board's soliciting input from the educational community, the responses were overwhelmingly favorable.

We have chosen to include our survey questions and a wide array of salient responses from the field, believing that the input provides valuable guidance to our leadership as elected officials and our direction to Commissioner Jones. The following twelve questions contain perhaps too many responses, but we chose to err on the side of inclusiveness. The last category (13) provides an opportunity for general comment. We then summarize the completed and ongoing initiatives in 2009-2010 by the commissioner and the Department of Education, and state our unequivocal approval of Commissioner Jones.

1. Commissioner Jones has supported rural, urban and suburban school systems in their efforts to graduate students and prepare them for success.

72% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

In the rural area I'm in I believe he has done a great job."

"We definitely feel we have a voice and are heard."

"Commissioner Jones is a true public school advocate."

"His strong commitment to be in the field as often as possible is truly impressive."

"The Commissioner is an effective leader; he does the right things and gets things done."

"Understanding budget considerations, it would be nice for him to physically visit more rural districts."

"Commissioner Jones has redefined the meaning of "support" by a state agency, and done so exceptionally well."

"He has but it has not been strong enough in my opinion for rural areas."

"From the rural perspective, the positive attention and support we have received from CDE has been most helpful, and I have heard similar thoughts from my non-rural counterparts."

"The Commissioner has visited and supported our area."

"He has prioritized dropout prevention and graduation success through commitment to the new CDE Dropout Prevention office and by encouraging the SBE to support legislative efforts to have a comprehensive dropout prevention/student re-engagement law (HB 09-1243) and a count date study law (SB 10-8)."

2. Commissioner Jones has demonstrated a capacity to develop new strategies for educating all students in the state. 71% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"I find he listens and doesn't rush to judgment."

"I appreciate his support of standards-based education."

"There has been little in terms of guidance and initiatives from CDE"

"Commissioner Jones is fully committed to increasing the achievement of all students."

"His willingness to continually take on the "elephants in the room" is very courageous."

"Colorado is a leading [force in] innovation; we now need to see the resources follow a sound plan!"

"He is also willing to try new ideas."

"Commissioner Jones sets a great example of collaborative leadership, and is obviously dedicated to educating ALL students."

"Under Dwight's leadership, CDE has become a highly respected unit of support for all of us in the field!"

"Yes, he continues to get the job done."

3. Commissioner Jones adequately communicates, listens, builds and strengthens the working relationships among all education stakeholders in Colorado; including parents, teachers, local school districts, the early childhood education community and the higher education system. 68% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"He is visible, inspiring and communicative and, for these qualities, we are grateful and thankful."

"In my mind the number one characteristic a leader needs is what you've listed above. He has these characteristics in abundance."

"I wish he could use his Superintendents Advisory council better."

"As one of my principals said after a group meeting with Dwight last year: "I would follow that man anywhere." Dwight Jones is a man we hold the highest respect for in the public education field and he is an incredible representative of CDE."

"He has visited our rural school district, meeting with our Board, teachers and administrators."

"I appreciate his visits and understandings of the individual districts."

"His presence is not felt with all stakeholders. Top down models for change should have input from all areas. Community meetings are not well publicized or organized to receive genuine input. They are designed to let the stakeholders know what is going to happen. Approach determines response and the community is not involved in the academic focus of the state. This is a rural perspective. I believe other city leaders would view this in an opposite light."

"He's very good at building K-12 and higher education relationships and issues, but has not adequately prioritized early childhood education efforts in CDE or in discussions with the SBE. He rarely discusses publicly ECE issues, doesn't highlight pre-k or the early childhood councils staff work with the SBE or publicly, barely mentioned it in Forward Thinking, and does not actively seek out ECE stakeholders who can help CDE and the SBE better integrate this "P" piece into a P-20 system. With the SBE having a fairly low level of emphasis on ECE (unlike the previous SBE), it is even more critical to focus on ECE, which is proven way to close achievement gaps. Also, some CDE staff and sometimes Commissioner Jones focuses their time and outreach to only district

stakeholders and not the nonprofit groups that play central roles in certain issues."

4. Within the past year, Commissioner Jones has improved the relationship between CDE and the school districts, educational organizations and the legislature. 66% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"CDE continues to be primarily a regulatory agency. Support is lacking, but accountability for schools is increasing."

"Licensure is completely underfunded and inadequate in this state."

"Maybe not so much this past year, but during his tenure it has been greatly improved."

"His staff is much more interested in our needs and challenges."

"Commissioner Jones has made it a top priority to be present and visible in school districts and at key CASE opportunities."

"It has gone from non-existent to worthy of being called a model in relationship building."

"The Commissioner is honest, collaborative, and courageously confronts thorny issues head-on."

"Yes, compared to the former superintendent who had little personal interaction with the districts."

"I believe CDE continues to make strides on this front."

"CDE seems less responsive than in the past."

"I believe the improvement skyrocketed when he took the position, and in the past year CDE has maintained their high quality in positive relationships."

"He attends the superintendent's meetings whenever possible and brings us the important news."

"The district no longer trusts the department. There are so many policies and legislative efforts that attack local control. This inevitably says to local leaders

that their knowledge is not important and that their knowledge is not valuable. The top down model has ruined the trust that the department is a resource."

"No evidence of that in our rural school district."

"Coming to our district a few weeks back was an incredible gesture."

"Commissioner Jones is a sincerely good listener and leader. He genuinely cares about the interests and needs of the districts and treats local districts, other education stakeholders and legislators with utmost respect. This is a huge difference from the previous commissioner. He struggled this past year with ensuring that his staff communicated the major change of demanding 10% CDE administrative costs in state legislation. In the past, this number was usually 1% and never higher than 3%. The failure to communicate this before the 2010 legislative session began caused relationship problems with legislators and nonprofit organizations that were proposing legislation. This information was not communicated until the fiscal notes were made public after the bills were introduced in January. This should have been expressly made clear to all legislators and nonprofits by November because in the recession especially, but also generally, fiscal notes can be significant barriers to enacted important legislation."

5. Commissioner Jones is an effective administrator with the skill to hire and delegate competent staff. 63% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"It is very poor having the limited Regional Managers for the whole state, not effective at all."

"There are some amazing staff people at CDE - talented, caring, and responsive."

"Those with whom I associate are highly competent and service-oriented and share Dwight's passion for teaching, learning and students."

6. Commissioner Jones has demonstrated personal and professional leadership success in the administration of public education. 77% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"The commissioner has excellent leadership skills."

"Don't think things in public education are changing fast enough. Worry about the future."

"Commissioner Jones masterfully establishes positive and productive relationships."

"I appreciate his close relationship with CASE."

"I haven't seen any movement from the 'status quo'. There is a lot of conversation, dialog and talk...but I haven't seen anything that would indicate that it is not 'business as usual'."

"When we think about CDE as a whole, we think about the man running the department. His demeanor, integrity, sense of humor and professionalism keep him in my highest esteem. This has been a particularly difficult year for districts in Colorado in light of the staggering cuts in funding. Through it all, Dwight has remained positive and helpful! He is a model leader."

7. Commissioner Jones has demonstrated sufficient personal knowledge and competence relative to current education trends in order to serve as an effective leader in innovation and reform. 76% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"Agree, but too much emphasis on data and too little on instruction."

"His courageous stand supporting SB-191 was impressive."

"The Commissioner entered his current position at a very difficult time. There are so many issues that he faces on a daily basis that it would be difficult for him to initiate innovation."

"Commissioner Jones' successful experience as a superintendent brings the credibility needed to serve in this capacity."

"He is emerging as a national leader in this area!"

"He is limited by the legislature and resources."

"Our revised Standards, new Accreditation system, the Colorado Growth Model and plans for a new student evaluation system are extremely ambitious, and so far have been successful."

"He is always looking for a better way to help our districts."

8. Commissioner Jones has represented Colorado well in his participation on national boards, panels and other forums where he has appeared in his official capacity. 71% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"Excellent job in this area."

"He has worked very hard on legislation and Race to the Top."

"The results he has obtained indicate good success in this area."

"He does not shy away from representing Colorado."

"CCSSO and McREL are prime examples of Commissioner Jones participating in important, relevant groups that his predecessor ignored and avoided. Also, his presence and attitude with NASBE is a huge improvement."

9. Commissioner Jones has demonstrated expertise in matters of public-school finance. 60% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"His leadership during this fiscal crisis for K-12 is appreciated."

"I do think Dr. Jones knows school finance, but I will bet it is from a larger district point of view. I do not think he understands the pressures of a small school superintendent who actually does the budget without the support of a trained business official, then he inputs the dollar amounts into the spread sheets, then figures out how to make it fly etc. etc."

"It takes a lot of guts to address such a central and critical issue as exists in the state of Colo."

"He needs to be a VERY vocal spokesperson with our legislators as far as funding for education."

"It has been a tough year, but CDE has continually communicated with us and that has made our task at the district level easier."

"If Commissioner Jones had demonstrated expertise in matters of public-school finance, he would have had an impact on school boards and superintendents around the state and school districts wouldn't be going to the taxpayers in November to get mil levy overrides because of budget shortfalls. We all saw this coming...but we chose to spend like there was no tomorrow and the spending we did had no effect in the classrooms."

"He has done this in a time which is financially stressful to all districts, yet it is CDE's increased support that is getting us all through it!"

"He is honest about the budget and the challenges which we appreciate."

"No evidence of that in our rural school district."

"I believe he has helped the urban schools and has done a poor job with rural schools."

"He has done this in a time which is financially stressful to all districts, yet it is CDE's increased support that is getting us all through it!"

"My thought doesn't fit well here, but the finance department that reimburses grants, etc. has become incredibly slow and the cumbersome rules get in the way of paying out, causing cash flow issues at my level."

"He is honest about the budget and the challenges which we appreciate."

"No evidence of that in our rural school district."

"The level of per pupil monies to support education in Colorado is disgraceful. Something needs to happen soon."

"True, with the exception of effectively communicating to lawmakers and nonprofits the change in the need for CDE administrative costs."

10. Commissioner Jones has successfully established a public-education vision for Colorado. 73% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"Agree, but I would encourage him to focus on growing principals and teachers, versus more data."

"Education for ALL and implementing the ALL part with consistency."

"Where have all the C.T.E. programs gone?"

"The vision is out there -- unfortunately you can't fight every battle in the public eye. Simply put the public does not know what educators know."

"True with the major exception of early childhood education, which again is a critical piece of the P-20 system."

"Forward Thinking is a hallmark for the State."

"His leadership in the Race to the Top has been strong."

"Hard to do with the state of finance in the state"

"Yes, a lot of educators are disgruntled but he is moving us to the big picture."

"Education for ALL and implementing the ALL part with consistency."

"He has the vision, now we need the funding to support it."

"This vision is also being communicated and recognized nationally."

"The Race for the Top was not well communicated to districts, especially rural districts"

"True with the major exception of early childhood education, which again is a critical piece of the P-20 system."

11. Service and support from CDE has improved in the last year in your district. 57% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"Licensure department is woefully understaffed, or else incompetent."

"The reduction in CDE staff has made it difficult to improve services and support."

"In some areas I agree but the micro management of minutes of contact tied to funding when resources are reduced has to stop. Too much money wasted on bureaucratic compliance."

"They aren't funded to do this and have had to lower these areas because of the funding they do have and where the focus must be."

"Regional managers a prime example of not being available on a regular basis."

"The support for the districts decreases each year. There are several attempts that have fallen flat. There is no longer district level support across the state without the regional managers."

"The limitations are inherent limitations of staffing resources."

"I really feel supported by CDE at this time. The partnership aspect of District and CDE relationships seems to be growing and yielding results for kids!"

"The new Accreditation process will dramatically help districts with a streamlined process and increased support. The Department has remained incredibly helpful and has given our district total support with field representatives, even though we are 300 miles from Denver!"

"The service has improved in most areas. Special education needs better follow up."

"I know longer feel like it is "us against them."

"To the best of their ability -- they return calls and are always ready to help. Finance Office is great!"

"The entire attitude from CDE is better to district administrations and boards - more supportive and less punitive. This doesn't mean that CDE supports everything our district does, and nor should it."

12. The commissioner has worked collaboratively and effectively with the other branches of government to effect policy change regarding pre K-12 education. 68% strongly agreed or agreed. Comments:

"While not his fault, the legislature is out of control with mandates, and the SBE is not far behind."

"During this entire funding crisis, Dwight has been the least vocal of anyone at the capital and he should have been out there lobbying and trying to get every dime he could for schools."

"The commissioner has worked closely and effectively with the State Board, the legislature, and the Governor's office."

"He is able to balance his student advocacy role with his state-wide administrative responsibilities. His political acumen is extraordinary."

"We have managed to track students through k-12 with a primary focus on Colleges while doing little to move students into a workforce."

"The policy change on teacher tenure was a difficult process, but thanks to Dwight's leadership, we can now have more effective teachers for our children."

"We have some excellent new policies regarding tenure and evaluation. We are going in the right direction!"

"CDE under Commissioner Jones has a substantially better relationship with both parties in the legislature and with the governor's office than under the previous commissioner."

13. The State Board provided an opportunity for general comments:

"We need to be able to talk to a human at any time."

"Commissioner Jones has worked hard to build trust between districts and CDE, but the missing link is the trust from our lawmakers that the experts in the field are the experts and need to be allowed to function within the parameters set by policy makers, but with more freedom from red tape."

"Dwight Jones has done an excellent job as Commissioner. We need him to stay in his position as long as possible for the benefit of the students in Colorado."

"Dwight is an outstanding, thoughtful, articulate, and visionary leader; and we are fortunate in Colorado to have him at the helm."

"Here are the things Dwight has done well:

- 1. Accreditation*
- 2. PR*
- 3. Race to the Top*
- 4. Sticking with a bad idea even when it's a bad idea.*
- 5. Advocating for solid and equitable education."*

"Dr. Jones has done a great job in the most difficult of financial times."

"Commissioner Jones is doing a great job in spite of all the negatives in education at this time (economy, multiple theories on improvement, legislative restrictions, etc.)."

"Licensing is a joke. We can't hire people because the state can't get this process done in a reasonable amount of time. Please fund it!"

"Dwight is the right person for the job. I appreciate his articulation of the right moral work."

"Commissioner Jones is the breath of fresh air that we need and our students deserve in Colorado. Thanks for having the insight to hire him."

"Dr. Jones is a great person, a good overall educational leader, but needs to listen more. The easily and often used phrases of "We do listen" and "I got it" need to be followed with actions that demonstrate them to be true. While filling out this survey I received word that they "found" money to do the rural schools project. Dr. Jones promised to put a rural administrator on his high level cabinet over two years ago. These people assigned to this project are not on the high level cabinet, but it is a start, a slow start, but a start, and I appreciate the effort. We will see what happens."

Commissioner Jones is the most effective leader of public education in Colorado in many years."

"Promised to visit all districts in the state - never been here. Tends to focus on urban/suburban districts and has no real understanding of public education in

rural Colorado, believe it or not, the state of Colorado does exist outside of Douglas, Jefferson, Larimer, Denver, and El Paso counties."

"My leadership team is very impressed with Dwight Jones' leadership of Colorado's public schools!"

"The Commissioner has done an outstanding job at CDE and has worked tirelessly to improve education in Colorado. He also values this area of the State (Durango) and makes every attempt to include us in decision making and important topics."

"Commissioner Jones is very approachable and always seems upbeat despite the recent turmoil. I can't think of a better person to do the job."

"We are very fortunate to continue to have him as our state leader."

"I am very proud to serve under the commanding leadership of Commissioner Jones, as he very effectively and efficiently performs the difficult duties of the chief executive and education officer of the State of Colorado."

"My district loves to work with CDE now - all do to Mr. Jones. He has done super job - hope he stays for many years to come."

"In all sincere honesty, I have not seen anything of significant change for our community or our state. We are barely making ends meet in our district and we struggle to bring our students up to the standards which seem to changing on a basis that is inconsistent and unattainable in several aspects."

CDE has been great to work with. We are enjoying a strong partnership with CDE on district improvement. I don't see where Dr. Jones has been involved in many of these categories."

"Commissioner Jones is an outstanding leader of public education in Colorado and the children of our schools are fortunate to have him as our Commissioner. As difficult as it is to make a difference in the classroom, from CDE, he has positively influenced classrooms in our district."

"I am proud to work as a superintendent under Commissioner Jones' leadership. Since becoming our Commissioner, he has collaborated with the best in education to turn CDE into a department worthy of state and national

recognition and accolades! Thank you for having the depth of understanding as a board to have chosen the very best person to lead Colorado in education!"

"The Commissioner is a great leader, man of character, personable, interesting, and a visionary. We're glad to have him!"

"Dwight Jones has been amazing to work with. I wish we could help him out with a better economy. Who knows where Colorado could go under his leadership if the state could support his initiatives."

"I think the Commissioner has appeared to establish a "vision," but in my opinion, it is a narrow, dangerous vision. I think the Commissioner has been relatively sincere in his political alliance with the Colorado Governor in the chase after Federal Race to the Top baited funds, which, in my opinion represent LONG term obligations for school districts and SHORT term money -- in essence, another link in the long chain of Federal unnecessary intrusion and unfunded mandates and the weakening of local control of neighborhood schools. The Commissioner's 'vision' for education in Colorado will turn out to be a terrible mistake for many rural students, since what has made public education strong internationally over the past 200 years has been the support of local neighborhood schools by local communities, and an emphasis on educating the whole child, not just pursuing high stakes test scores."

"I am very impressed with the commissioner's efforts and accomplishments especially in light of the significant financial difficulties experienced in the past two years."

"Commissioner Jones has been a breath of fresh air and I think he has taken a big step in making Colorado a wonderful place to educate ALL students. I want to thank the State Board for having the foresight to hire Commissioner Jones and I want to Thank Commissioner Jones for being true to his word."

"CDE is currently demonstrating leadership qualities and strategies that are often dispelled in research and common sense. I hope money will not always be the driving force behind our decisions. Race to the Top is simply a form of welfare that tells other states that we are unable to take care of our own. Mr. Jones showed more promise prior to this initiative."

"To be honest with you, I do not have a high regard for the work done by the commissioner or the CDE this past year. I have seen CADI audits over the last 5 years that lack any measurable goals or consequences. I have seen hopes pinned

on a district which has no supporting evidence their system will work. Although I understand the concept of local control, there needs to be a higher authority to step in when superintendents do not perform to a high state standard. There should be no excuses or labels attached to children from a low socio-economic background. Every child can learn and there are pockets of excellence all around this state that demonstrates it can be done."

"I cannot begin to express how much I appreciate Commissioner Jones' approach to the new state standards. All stakeholders were given ample opportunity for input.

I have my concerns about HB-191, did we sell out CO education for Federal funds? I believe tenure needs to go away, I also believe CO needs the RTT funds, from my standpoint it appeared too political in order to obtain the RTT funds.

"I am in full support of our commissioner and hope that he remains in place for another 10 years!

Colorado has big problems that unfortunately have trickled into our K-12 system operations. Despite that our students are improving and will continue to improve if we can get the kind of support that our state K-12 program needs."

"Commissioner Jones is an honest, genuine, truly caring person, who is able to translate these qualities into leading CDE. It's important that he continues to support districts generally, but not entirely. Sometimes districts are unreasonable (including EDAC) and need to be challenged by his staff, which does happen. The department has done exceptional work on education accountability reform, educator effectiveness and dropout prevention. Highlighting the department's focus and work on early childhood education is an imperative challenge for him."

The State Board notes that Commissioner Jones has set out ambitious goals for Colorado. We continue to work closely with him on these goals. After considering the input from the education community, it is helpful to review the completed and ongoing projects underway at the Department of Education. They include:

- Supporting the State Board's adoption in December 2009 of the new state model content standards in thirteen disciplines, and overseeing the rollout of those standards;
- Developing a new assessment based on the Colorado standards with a target date of 2014;

- Overseeing the implementation of the Education Accountability Act of 2009 (SB09-163), including aligning conflicting accountability systems into a single system, modernizing and aligning reporting of state, district and school performance information, and creating a more effective cycle of support and intervention;
- Beginning the rollout on August 13, 2010 for new district performance frameworks measuring student academic growth, student achievement levels, and achievement gaps;
- Overseeing the development of core requirements and uses for educator evaluations;
- Identifying nineteen “Tier 1” schools that will receive intense turnaround support using federal Title 1 School Improvement Grant and overseeing Colorado’s receipt of \$39.7 million in funding for intervention services to struggling schools;
- Reducing the time to process educator license applications through a new online program beginning September 1, 2010;
- Implementing the School Counselor Corps Grant program;
- Implementing the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act, which improves the quality of concurrent enrollment programs, improves coordination between institutions of secondary education and higher education and ensures financial transparency and accountability;
- Collaborating with the Colorado Legacy foundation on improving health and wellness for children;
- Overseeing efforts of the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-Engagement in designating five districts to receive support and technical assistance from the Department, including review and assessment of district policies, practices and data trends;
- Supporting the efforts of the Capital Construction Office and the Public School Capital Construction Assistance Board in managing the “Building Excellent Schools Today” program, which funded 69 projects in 56 school districts by the end of the 2009-2010 fiscal year; and
- Collaborating with other state agencies to manage a \$17.4 million grant to create a new statewide system which tracks student and educator data from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary education and the workforce.

In conclusion, we recognize the magnitude and importance of the work Commissioner Jones has undertaken. The State Board regrettably accepted his resignation on November 4th, 2010. His last day as Colorado Commissioner of Education was December 13, 2010. We support Commissioner Jones' decision to accept the position of superintendent with the Clark County School District in Nevada, but will miss his leadership and collaboration in education reform.

Very truly yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Bob Schaffer', with a large, stylized initial 'B' and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Bob Schaffer
Chairman
On Behalf of the State Board of Education