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update



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COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION



HAPPY NEW YEAR!

I am amazed at how quickly time passes! Back from the holidays, we at CDE have hit the ground running, readying ourselves for what promises to be an exciting year. I look forward to this legislative session, and to working with the governor and our representatives to better education for all of Colorado's children. We have made great strides toward changing the tide of education in Colorado, and I am pleased to highlight some of these changes:

- We have overhauled our Web services, making accessibility easier. CDE's new site is scheduled to debut in February.
- We are introducing a "parent portal," which will allow parents to directly access their child's CSAP data from a secure Web site.
- We are enlisting content experts to provide better support to districts in such areas as math, science, social studies and the arts. Another expert will focus solely on the achievement gap and strategies to eliminate it.
- We are examining the state content standards to ensure relevancy for today's students and the world in which they live.
- We are collaborating with higher education to create a seamless transition from high school to college. We are also looking at how we can predict student success earlier in their "educational career" – in the middle grades, perhaps.
- We are simplifying the accreditation process for school districts and establishing standards and protocols to ensure the integrity of online programs.
- We are actively participating in legislative conversations, as well as seeking input and partnership from business leaders.
- We have formed the Colorado Legacy Foundation, a non-profit organization dedicated to supporting the initiatives of the department of education.

1. Forward Thinking

In September the department released *Forward Thinking*, its plan to raise the bar and boldly change the look and delivery of education in Colorado. Since its release, many CDE staff have been assigned to a task force /committee dedicated to each specific goal. These groups meet regularly to discuss research, findings and strategies, to assign

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new tasks and to lay out next steps. Early in 2008 via the CDE Web site, the public will be able to track the status of each goal and gauge progress being made toward achieving it. Projections and timelines will also be noted. This in itself will bring the department one step closer to achieving one of those goals – that of being transparent.

2. Colorado Reading First

Despite letters of protests, personal testimony and other input, it seems that federal funding for Title I (Reading First) will be considerably less than in years past. This is unfortunate due to the outstanding progress made by many youngsters in Title I schools across Colorado. Two Reading First schools were nationally recognized as “Title I Distinguished Schools” this year: Las Animas Elementary School (Las Animas) and West Park Elementary School (Leadville). They are excellent examples of the many schools across the state doing great work on behalf of children.

Las Animas Elementary received the award for outstanding academic achievement for Title I students. Ninety-two percent of students were proficient or advanced in reading, and 87 percent were proficient or advanced in math. West Park Elementary was noted for closing the achievement gap between students eligible for free and reduced lunch (FRL) and students who are not eligible. In 2005-2006, 75 percent of FRL students scored proficient. In 2006-2007, that percentage rose to 95 percent proficiency!

While federal funding of Title I has yet to be determined, one thing is certain: Colorado Reading First schools are teaching our youngsters to read and achieve at high levels.

3. Review of CDE’s Data Analysis and Collection

On Dec. 10, 2007, the department released the results of an in-depth analysis of its data collection and reporting systems. This review was predicated by HB 07-1270, which called for a study of data processes, policies and technology infrastructure. The North Highland Company conducted the review by interviewing administrators in 30 districts and surveying the other 143 districts online.

It came at no surprise that the study revealed what many already knew – that “the data collection process is fragmented, contains redundancies across data collections and does not involve the stakeholders.” The review also identified ways to streamline the process and make reporting and collection less arduous. The entire report is available at www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html.

4. All-Day Kindergarten

In order to determine the feasibility and costs related to statewide funding of all-day kindergarten, the Colorado General Assembly has requested that each school district submit an all-day kindergarten phase-in plan by Feb. 1, 2008. Information is being collected via an online survey (which constitutes a plan), accessed only by a username and passcode. To obtain yours, please contact Lori Goodwin Bowers, 303.866.6783 (bowers_l@cde.state.co.us) or Jane Miyahara, 303.866.6334 (miyahara_j@cde.state.co.us).

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5. School District Visits

When I was appointed in June, I committed to visit all 178 school districts in Colorado. As of today, I have met individually with 24 superintendents, toured their districts and met with some of their students. I have visited the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind and the Classical Academy in Colorado Springs, as well as a handful of online learning centers in the Denver metro area. Whether large districts or small, suburban or rural, I am impressed overall with the dedication of teachers, the interest of students and the college plans of many of our high school students.

Since the Colorado Department of Higher Education (formerly CCHE) announced its refined college entrance requirements, I have asked teachers and superintendents I've visited with whether these standards will pose problems for them. The overwhelming response has been "no," and those that may have encountered road blocks are working creatively with other districts and BOCES to ensure their students have access to the classes they need. Working cooperatively with the BOCES is a goal of *Forward Thinking* and an area the department will continue to monitor in the months ahead.

6. Educator Licensure

By today's standards, the current system to process initial licenses as well as renewals is antiquated. While CDE has direct oversight for much of the process, we do rely on the Colorado Bureau of Investigation (CBI) and the FBI for fingerprint and background checks, which can take up to 62 working days to complete. At present, the department is implementing procedures to streamline its part of the process, including creating online systems for the application for and printing of licenses, and developing electronic bridges between CDE and both CBI and institutes of higher education. In addition to requesting funds to support another staff person, the department is performing an efficiency study to determine what other actions should be taken to expedite the licensure process.

7. Student Course Taking Data Collection Input Sessions

Within the next month the Data and Research Unit will be gathering feedback from school districts and other interested parties about the upcoming student course taking data collection. HB 07-1345 Modifications to School Accountability Reports (SARs) requires future reports to display pupil-teacher ratios by subject area for secondary schools. Dates and locations for these feedback sessions will be announced shortly.

8. Save the Date(s)

- Colorado Reading Summit ~ May 12, 2008 ~ Adams Mark Hotel, Denver
- Commissioner's Cup (luncheon) ~ June 25, 2008 ~ Sewell Ballroom at the Denver Center for the Performing Arts

Update is a periodical review of matters and issues pertinent to education across Colorado. Written by Colorado Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones, this brief is distributed via e-mail to board members, superintendents, staff, legislators, community leaders, educators, parents and all other concerned citizens. To be included or removed from this mailing list, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.