



# 2010 FORWARD THINKING PROGRESS REPORT

Colorado Department of Education

**cde** Improving  
Academic  
Achievement



# A Note from Commissioner Jones

## To the Education Community of Colorado,

*The wheels of education reform in Colorado are turning with newfound traction. The pace is quick, fueled by the determination to improve the quality of teaching and learning on behalf of Colorado's school children.*

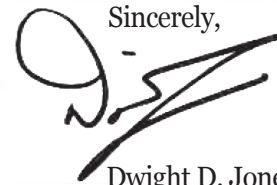
Rarely have so many major components of the public school infrastructure received so much attention at the same time. New content standards are being implemented. A new statewide assessment system is under construction. The state's new accountability system rolls out in earnest this coming fall. New legislation, approved with bipartisan support, puts in motion the effort to assemble a new teacher evaluation system that will connect teachers' career advancement with student success. And, using primarily federal resources, intensive turnaround plans are being readied for 19 low-performing schools.

These upgrades are being performed in concert and in collaboration with statewide stakeholders. They are also being done with growing enthusiasm and excitement. There is reason to be optimistic; support for this work comes from all corners. The Colorado State Board of Education remains an unwavering champion of progress and common-sense improvements. The Colorado State Legislature continues to invest in the department's work, despite an economic downturn. Gov. Bill Ritter has been a stalwart friend—and leader. State and school district officials have joined the conversation (and the work) at many levels and the non-profit community has been a thoughtful source of advice and valuable resources.

We are nearing the end of a three-year run under "Forward Thinking," and many of the original projects have been completed or are nearing completion. The following report recaps highlights from the 2009-2010 school year and provides a glimpse of the road we are travelling with our many partners. This report reflects only some of the work. For more detail and to track projects as they evolve, please visit the CDE Web site.

Improved student success remains our collective responsibility. Far more students need to exit high school with the skills and knowledge they need to pursue their dreams. With the broad commitment of so many, the growing confidence is justified. Thank you to all teachers, educators and community members who work hard every day on behalf of students. You are making a difference!

Sincerely,



Dwight D. Jones  
Commissioner of Education





# Introduction

*Major transitions are altering the landscape of public education in Colorado. Changes are being driven by state and federal initiatives. Together, the changes are building a new framework for teachers and students. There are higher and clearer standards, expectations and statewide definitions for what it means to be ready for school and ready for college or career success.*

At the Colorado Department of Education, much of the work falls under the larger umbrella of building a single, clear Statewide System of Accountability and Support. This system is designed as a blueprint for CDE's delivery of accountability, support and intervention. It is the responsibility of the department to ensure that accountability and support provided is coordinated and that the department speaks with one, unified voice. As a result, while there are many discreet strands of work, they are frequently intertwined with one another.

The mission of the Statewide System of Accountability and Support is to build the capacity of districts to create and sustain high performing schools where ALL learners demonstrate high academic growth. Below are a few examples of the Colorado reform agenda:

## State

- ☑ **In December 2009, the Colorado State Board of Education adopted new state model content standards—the first time the standards (in 13 total disciplines) have been updated in 14 years.** The change was called for by the state board (in 2007) and in the state legislature (in 2008). Additionally, Senate Bill 08-212 expanded the vision of public education outcomes with the inclusion of higher education and early education goals into one seamless standards policy. The vision expects students to have opportunities for college or workplace success. The new standards add 21st century skills. They are fewer, clearer and set a higher bar. They incorporate early childhood, postsecondary and workforce readiness expectations. They encourage students to master concepts, not just learn facts.
- ☑ **New standards require a new assessment, one which will measure student progress toward the new expectations for learning.** The new test is being developed, although the implementation schedule has been slowed due to tight resources, a function of the economic downturn. A transition plan is underway that will end with all students taking the new assessment in spring 2014.



☑ **The Education Accountability Act of 2009 (S.B. 09-163) holds the state, districts and individual public schools accountable for performance on the same set of indicators and related measures statewide.** The major purposes of the law include:

1. Aligning conflicting accountability systems into a single system that passes federal muster.
2. Modernizing and aligning reporting of state, district and school performance information.
3. Creating a fairer, clearer and more effective cycle of support and intervention.
4. Enhancing state, district and school oversight of improvement efforts.

☑ **After a “hold harmless” year of evaluating how the new system works, new district performance frameworks will be rolled out in earnest in the fall of 2010.** The new frameworks use an expanded set of indicators including student academic growth (as measured by the Colorado Growth Model), student achievement levels (measured by the percent of students scoring advanced, proficient, partially proficient and unsatisfactory), the extent of achievement gaps based on income and ethnicity and postsecondary readiness (as measured by graduation rates and results of college-placement tests).

☑ **With the passage of S.B. 09-191 in May 2010, the Colorado State Legislature and Gov. Bill Ritter set in a motion new core requirements and uses for educator evaluations.** Developing the new system will take time, beginning with an agreed-upon definition of “educator effectiveness.” Details of the new system will be worked out by the appointed State Council for Educator Effectiveness and presented to the elected state board of education. The law will be fully implemented in the 2014-2015 school year. Under the law, key features include:

1. Educator effectiveness is to be determined by use of “fair, transparent, timely, rigorous and valid methods.”
2. Evaluations will be done at least once a year.
3. Performance standards shall include at least three levels — highly effective, effective and ineffective.
4. At least 50 percent of a teacher’s evaluation must be based on the academic growth of students.
5. At least 50 percent of a principal’s evaluation is to be determined by the academic growth of students in a school and the effectiveness of the school’s teachers.
6. Expectations of student growth can take into consideration such factors as student mobility and numbers of special education and high-risk students.





## Federal

- ☑ **The state has applied for Phase 2 resources under the federal Race to the Top competition.** If successful, a potential \$175 million will be available to the state of Colorado to work on initiatives designed to reduce the dropout rate, boost educator effectiveness, improve data systems and turnaround low-performing schools. Thematically, this high-stakes competition matched the reform plan already underway in Colorado and simultaneously challenged state political and educational leadership to sharpen its work, particularly in the area of educator effectiveness.
- ☑ **The national Common Core State Standards in Mathematics and English Language Arts were released in June 2010.** CDE has engaged a third-party reviewer to begin a line-by-line technical analysis and a proposal of ways to enrich the Colorado Academic Standards with content from the Common Core State Standards. Members of the Colorado Academic Standards subcommittees will provide feedback on this analysis and a survey will be available to gauge the interest of the public in this important initiative. A process has been established for the Colorado State Board of Education to decide whether to make any adjustments to the state standards.
- ☑ **The state has identified 19 “Tier I” schools that will receive intense turnaround support using federal Title I School Improvement Grant funding.** School improvement is required for chronically low-performing schools in Colorado under both federal guidance and state law. Federal guidance for Title I School Improvement Grants requires schools to implement one of four intervention models in order to boost student achievement. Nineteen educational service providers have also been identified to assist with school transformation and turnaround efforts.





# Forward Thinking

*Since 2007, “Forward Thinking” has provided the roadmap for the department’s work. These goals have served the department well in aligning and focusing the work at hand. **The goals are:***

1. Provide guidance and support to meet school and district needs.
2. Enhance professional development involving best practices.
3. Develop tools to eliminate gaps and increase achievement for all.
4. Implement a seamless, collaborative leadership system with intentional intensity, urgency and impatience.
5. Make efficient, effective use of federal, state and private funds.
6. Become a reliable source for research, data and analysis.
7. Define, detail and implement a model that builds and expands leadership capacity.



Following are updates regarding key state board of education initiatives that have been launched by the vision of “Forward Thinking” and by the Colorado State Legislature — or both. The work on many of these initiatives began in 2007.

## New Standards Roll Out

The department is working with stakeholders to design a comprehensive approach to supporting the transition to the revised Colorado Academic Standards (approved in December 2009). This process includes four broad phases: awareness, transition, implementation and transformation. A Colorado Academic Standards Reference System has been created to assist districts in aligning curriculum with standards. Districts can use the system to identify and organize each element of the Colorado Academic Standards.



The “Standards Implementation Presentation Toolkit” has been provided to CDE staff through a number of training sessions that included presentations, handouts and resources to allow the state leaders to speak knowledgeably about the standards as they are out in the field.

To assist districts in the work of building awareness, a series of regional meetings have been scheduled to give leaders tools and resources to use in their districts. A glossary is currently being created to aid in the understanding of the elements within the Colorado Academic Standards Reference System.

## Closing the Achievement Gap Pilot Expands

In May 2010, the department announced that 11 school districts in Colorado have been selected to receive one-time funding to support efforts to close achievement gaps and improve student achievement. These 11 school districts are in addition to the six districts participating in a pilot. With funding from the Colorado State Legislature (\$1.7 million), the 11 districts were selected based on persistent gaps in achievement and growth associated with race, income and low student achievement.

The department’s work on closing achievement gaps began in 2008 in partnership with six districts – Roaring Fork School District RE-1, Eagle County School District RE-50, Summit School District RE-1, Weld County School District 6 (Greeley-Evans), St. Vrain Valley School District RE-1J and Yuma School District RJ-1. Each district is working with an independent service provider to assist in the implementation of the project. Initial analysis suggests a positive impact from this work.

## Educational Alignment Act Leads to New Accountability and Accreditation System

The Education Accountability Act of 2009 (S.B. 09-163) holds the state, districts and individual public schools accountable for performance on the same set of indicators and related measures statewide. The department is managing implementation of this legislation and this year published a district accountability handbook, distributed a model district accreditation contract and published timelines for district accreditation. The department is also in the process of organizing members for the State Review Panel to assist the department and state board of education in carrying out the state’s system of accountability and support.

## Colorado Growth Model Draws National Interest, Adds New Features

Colorado is leading the effort to collaborate with other states to adapt the Colorado Growth Model for their purposes, rather than have states build their own model independently. The collaboration will allow for comparisons of the relative effectiveness of education reforms among participating states. To date, 12 states





have joined the collaborative effort. The Colorado Growth Model provides a common understanding of how individual students and groups of students progress from year to year toward meeting or exceeding state standards. The model accounts for each individual student's starting point and compares his or her progress to students with similar academic histories. The data visualization tool allows educators to monitor student growth and achievement and set goals for continuous improvement. A new version of the Colorado Growth Model debuted in 2010 including the addition of past years' growth and achievement results for 2007, 2008 and 2009 and the ability to view disaggregated subgroups of students at the district level.

## **Professional License Processing Time Reduced**

The Office of Professional Services continues to streamline the process for licensing teachers, including the development of an online application system. Previously a 14-week process, teachers who submit a complete application for a license today can expect it to take four to eight weeks. This accomplishment is even more remarkable given the surge in applications (most likely a function of economic conditions).

## **Federal School Turnaround Grants Focus Resources, Increase Intensity**

The U.S. Department of Education this year provided \$39.7 million to Colorado and approved the state's plan for providing intervention services to struggling schools. Federal guidance for Title I School Improvement Grants requires schools to implement one of four intervention models in order to boost student achievement. Nineteen schools have been identified for the first phase of work and providers have also been approved to assist in the transformation efforts.

## **School Counselor Corps Grant Propels More Students to College**

The School Counselor Corps effort continues to expand. Grants, stemming from a 2008 state law, are intended to help districts implement a comprehensive counseling program that develops partnerships with postsecondary and community leaders, collects data to inform the practice, creates personal plans for students and transforms the college-bound culture.

During year two of the School Counselor Corps Grant program, 90 schools in 37 districts and/or the Charter School Institute were awarded School Counselor Corps funds. In total, the \$5 million grant program was able to support 75.5 secondary counselors who provided services to more than 82,000 students of which over 38,000 (46 percent) are economically disadvantaged.





Findings reveal that the number of college applications submitted increased by 1,011 (from 8,911 to 9,922) and, when compared with the first year of the program, the total amount students received in scholarships increased by \$5 million (from \$18,172,719 to \$23,682,426).

## Concurrent Enrollment Provides Consistent “Fifth-Year” Opportunities

In May 2009, Colorado State Legislature passed the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act. The collective intent is to broaden access to and improve the quality of concurrent enrollment programs, improve coordination between institutions of secondary education and institutions of higher education and ensure financial transparency and accountability. Beyond coordinating and clarifying the existing concurrent enrollment programs, the bill also creates the “fifth year” ASCENT program for students retained by the high school for instruction beyond the senior year.

Following organization by the department, the Concurrent Enrollment Advisory Board (13 members) has met five times and has provided recommendations for a set of guidelines for the new ASCENT program. The board has also created agreement templates and suggested application forms for Concurrent Enrollment and ASCENT programs.

## Teacher Effectiveness Work Begins

The state’s strategies to improve educator effectiveness were given a major boost in the spring of 2010. Gov. Bill Ritter signed Senate Bill 10-191, calling for educator evaluations to be linked closely with student achievement, and the state board of education unanimously approved a resolution supporting 16 steps being taken by CDE to ensure “that every child in Colorado has access to an effective teacher in his or her classroom and effective principal in his or her school.” The Commissioner has invited the Colorado Legacy Foundation and The New Teacher Project to conduct independent analysis of available data and make recommendations for aligning CDE activities and goals to support and improve educator effectiveness across Colorado. This work is supported by an \$800,000, two-year grant from the Rose Community Foundation. The New Teacher Project has raised an additional \$200,000 from other private donors to support its work.

## Literacy Grants & Initiatives Boosts Professional Development

Reading First and Read to Achieve programs provided professional development opportunities for principals, literacy coaches, teachers and paraprofessionals. Topics included training in differentiated instruction, writing in the reading classroom, building reading fluency, active engagement strategies and the use of data to drive instruction.



Districts throughout the state were given the opportunity to participate in the DIBELS assessment training, designed to build capacity within schools and districts and to examine changes in the “DIBELS Next” edition.

During the 2009-2010 school year, the Literacy Grants and Initiatives staff conducted more than 100 site visits to support Reading First and Read to Achieve schools in raising literacy achievement.

In an effort to support enhanced literacy instruction in schools across Colorado, the Literacy Support Team was formed in September 2009. This team of educators from across the state received training in the fundamentals of the reading process and data analysis.

## Colorado Legacy Foundation Identifies Innovators in Health & Wellness

Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones recognized 11 school districts and two schools at the second annual Commissioner’s Choice Awards hosted by the Colorado Legacy Foundation. The awards recognize school districts and schools that truly apply best practices and get results. This year’s award winners are taking innovative steps to improve health education, nutrition, physical activity, school health services and workplace wellness. The announcement of award winners coincided with the Colorado Legacy Foundation’s release of its new online 2009 Health and Wellness Best Practices Guide, offering best practices, action steps and success stories for educators, parents and community members who want to create healthier schools. It features at-a-glance checklists to help school districts measure their efforts in health education, nutrition, physical activity, school health services and workplace wellness. The guide was the second in a series of best practices published by the Colorado Legacy Foundation in collaboration with the Colorado Department of Education.

## Dropout Prevention Work Ties In National Networks

The Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement was launched in October 2009 to expand efforts in reducing the dropout rate, building on the state’s commitment to ensure graduation and school success for all students and re-engaging out of school youth. It was created with State Fiscal Stabilization Funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009 and was authorized by state statute. In January 2010, Colorado was one of six states selected to participate in the National Governors Association’s State Strategies to Achieve Graduation for All initiative. The CDE office of dropout prevention serves in partnership with the Colorado Graduates Initiatives and joins with Massachusetts, Minnesota, New Hampshire, Tennessee and West Virginia to develop comprehensive state dropout prevention and recovery policies.

In February and March 2010, the office completed and presented the first annual policy report on dropout prevention and student re-engagement to the state legislature. The report provides an overview of





dropouts in Colorado and includes an analysis of incidence, factors and impacts of dropouts, data on school attendance and truancy, review of state statutes and investment in dropout prevention and recommendations.

In February 2010, the state board of education adopted emergency rules to provide guidance to the office in identifying the districts most in need of support to increase graduation rates and decrease annual dropout rates and dropout rate. The permanent rules were adopted in May 2010.

In March 2010, five districts were identified to receive support and technical assistance from the office. To date this support includes a review and assessment of district policies, practices and data trends. The review and assessment process has also informed district planning to increase student graduation and school completion.

## **BEST Boosts Classroom Environments Statewide**

Established in 2008, the “Building Excellent Schools Today” (BEST) program provides annual funding in the form of competitive grants, to school districts, charter schools, boards of cooperative educational services and the Colorado School For the Deaf and the Blind. BEST funds can be used for the construction of new schools as well as general construction and renovation of existing school facility systems and structures, with health and safety issues as the priority.

At the end of the 2009-2010 fiscal year, 69 projects had been funded in 56 school districts. In all, \$212.7 million was provided through BEST for these projects and districts contributed \$98.6 million in matching funds. In June 2010, CDE’s Capital Construction Office and the Public School Capital Construction Assistance Board reviewed another 102 applications requesting \$467.4 million in additional grant support.

## **Longitudinal Data Systems Grant Will Sharpen Analysis**

Colorado was awarded a \$17.4 million grant from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to create a new statewide system to track student and educator data from pre-kindergarten to postsecondary education and the workforce. The competitive grant was part of \$250 million awarded to a total of 20 states. All states applied and Colorado’s award was the fourth largest among the winning states. The funds will pay for a statewide longitudinal data system to enable Colorado to track student progress from early childhood until their career while also protecting privacy. The data system was developed by the Governor’s Office of Information Technology, the Governor’s Office of Policy and Initiatives and the Colorado Departments of Education, Higher Education, Human Services and Labor and Employment. The system will capture student data from multiple sources and allow for data sharing across multiple agencies to inform policies and be available to parents, students, educators, policymakers and researchers.



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