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## **News Release**

### ***Commissioner Dwight Jones Announces "Forward Thinking" Plan to Improve Service to Schools***

Commissioner Dwight Jones today announced the launch of *Forward Thinking*, the department's new plan to increase the graduation rate and close the achievement gap in all Colorado schools.

The main goal of *Forward Thinking* is "to create a purpose-driven and dynamic system of educational leadership, service and support that relentlessly focuses on the learning of ALL students." The plan was reviewed at a recent Colorado Board of Education retreat (Aug. 29 and 30). It garnered unanimous support.

"The Colorado Department of Education is capable of providing powerful resources to the effort to improve instruction across the state," said Commissioner Jones, whose term began June 1, 2007. "The resources are the experienced and talented educational leaders on staff at CDE and the state and federal funds that flow through this department. After three months here, it is has become increasingly clear that we need to better harness all resources in a way to sharpen the focus in schools and classrooms every day."

*Forward Thinking* and an executive summary are available through the CDE web site at [http://www.cde.state.co.us/index\\_commiss.htm](http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_commiss.htm).

The plan includes seven main goals including improving guidance and support services to meet district and school needs, providing comprehensive professional development in best instructional practices, serving as a reliable source for research, data and analysis, and expanding leadership capacity through the establishment of professional development and research centers.

*Forward Thinking* also calls for McREL (Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning) to work with the department to design a long-term strategy.

The business community will gain a strong voice and have a clear role in the department's changing role with the creation of "21<sup>st</sup> Century Strategic Partnerships," joining public and private efforts in supporting student learning. The partnership will:

- Establish the Colorado Legacy Foundation, a nonprofit organization that will support innovations, entrepreneurship and the dissemination of best practices.
- Create a Commissioner's Council on Innovation and Entrepreneurship.
- Create a "CDE Best Practices Guide," to be distributed annually with leading practices in teaching and learning.
- Establish a "Commissioner's Cup" award to honor districts that are leading dynamic public education system-change efforts.
- Create a "Commissioner's Summit," an annual three-day retreat for K-12 superintendents and university, civic and business leaders.
- Create "Colorado Legacy Scholars," a new scholarship fund that awards a full-ride scholarship to 100 of Colorado's top high school seniors to attend a Colorado university or college *and* who, in return, agree to teach for some time period (3 to 4 years, perhaps) following graduation in one of Colorado's hard-to-staff K-12 schools or hard-to-staff teaching positions (such as math or science).

"The state of Colorado places the authority for how schools are managed and what is taught with the local school district superintendents and Boards of Education," said Commissioner Jones. "But the state has a clear role in highlighting what works and serving schools as we all work together to improve student achievement."

### **Reorganization to support new mission**

Commissioner Dwight Jones also announced a series of staff appointments and promotions as part of the changing roles and responsibilities in the department to implement *Forward Thinking*.

New to the Colorado Department of Education staff is Ken Turner, deputy commissioner for learning services and results. Turner began work Aug. 1.

Turner had served as Deputy Superintendent for Academy District 20 in Colorado Springs. He has been a teacher in Boulder, principal in Littleton,

administrator in Westminster, and an adjunct faculty member at the University of Colorado.

In 2001-2005, Turner directed a study of longitudinal growth that looked at achievement in half of the state student population. Findings form the basis for Colorado law that places reliance on long-term growth as the key to evaluating school and district performance.

Karen Stroup, a 32-year veteran of the Colorado Department of Education, was named deputy commissioner for management and operations. Stroup has served as an accountant and budget officer prior to being named chief of staff in 1993.

Other appointments include:

- Kelly Leid, associate commissioner for strategic partnerships. Leid is currently the executive director of the Foundation for Educational Excellence, which has worked in the Green Valley Ranch and Montbello sections of Denver and in Aurora to improve public schools. Leid's position will be privately funded.
- Jeanette Cornier, assistant commissioner of standards support. A former school administrator and instructional coach, Dr. Cornier holds a Ph.D. in Educational Leadership and has been with the department since 2000. For the past three years, Cornier has served as a principal consultant in the Office of Learning and Results and previously served as a senior consultant in the Exceptional Student Services Unit.
- Gerry Difford, assistant to the commissioner focusing on accreditation and regional services. Difford has been a special assistant to the commissioner since 1999. He formerly worked as former assistant superintendent in Cherry Creek Schools, executive director of the Colorado Association of School Executives, and as area superintendent and principal in Jefferson County Schools.
- Debora Scheffel, director of literacy support and competitive grants. Scheffel was named director of competitive grants and awards in the department in 2005. Previously, Scheffel worked as director of University Assessment at the University of Northern Colorado in Greeley.
- Jami Goetz, director of professional licensing. Dr. Goetz came to CDE in November 2006 to supervise the alternative licensure program, which provides on-the-job training for individuals who want to become teachers. Goetz holds a Ph.D. in special education with an emphasis in severe disabilities and assistive technology.

Commissioner Jones recently appointed Pamela Hoppe Ice, from West Virginia, as director of online learning and Anne Barkis as the department's legislative liaison.

One appointee, the director of information management, has yet to be named.

*"Forward Thinking* calls for the department to reorganize around clear goals," said Commissioner Jones. "With this new leadership structure and sense of purpose, we will strive to create an environment for student success statewide."

**For more information, contact** Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Tanya Price, 303-866-6397, in the CDE Office of Communications.

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