



Colorado Department of Education
William J. Moloney, Commissioner



***"To everything there is a season, and
a time to every purpose under the
heaven."***

- Ecclesiastes 3:1

February 8, 2007

COMMISSIONER OF EDUCATION: CHANGE AND CONTINUITY

Over a year ago, it was evident to me that Colorado was approaching a New Era in general and in particular with regard to education reform.

January 2007 would see the inauguration of a new Governor. Election results and term limits would mean a new look in the General Assembly. Very important to the State Board of Education would be the shift from its eight-member configuration to the more traditional seven-member body of previous years.

All of this would coincide with my rounding out ten years as Commissioner of Education.

These circumstances allied to personal and professional reasons strongly suggested that this would be a good time to inaugurate a conversation with the State Board of Education about an orderly and effective process that would lead to the selection of a new Commissioner of Education.

Given the turbulence that commonly attends election years, we knew that this was not the optimum time to inaugurate a search process. Accordingly, I pledged to the Board that I would see them through the election and into the above noted New Era. In the interest of stability, we appropriately agreed not to indulge in any public discussion.

The anticipated transition and the new era came. In terms of the political landscape, it was a more striking transformation in Colorado and nationally than most would have expected.

What would Colorado education reform look like in this new time?

In many ways, it will continue to build upon the stability and continuity of the Romer-Owens era. Commitment to lifting student achievement, closing the achievement gap and promoting accountability remains powerful.

Yet, the reform conversation will change inevitably in ways we cannot fully anticipate. Some think the pace will slow down, yet phenomena such as Tough Choices or Tough Times suggest it will speed up and become even more sweeping in character.

A quarter of a century after A Nation at Risk we are rightly alarmed at the glacial pace of change, the intractable dilemmas of urban education, the worsening indicators regarding dropouts, graduation rates, and youth violence, and the depressing argumentation that seems to attend every step of the reform journey.

Yet, the mounting and incontrovertible evidence that the poorest school can be dramatically transformed by the combination of strong leadership and clearly focused instruction must lift our spirits. What is needed, is that we should brush aside any false pride that we

have that so many such schools exist and instead find a national will that insists – in terms of a moral imperative – that such a school is the absolute birth right of every American child.

As my season as Colorado's Commissioner moves towards its close this summer, there are too many people – heroes of Colorado education – to thank and praise individually. Yet I would be remiss if I did not acknowledge that remarkable group of 19 individuals who has served on the Colorado State Board of Education over the last decade. Steadfastly, every one has been an advocate of high standards, rigorous assessment, and strong accountability. For no pay, long hours, and frequent abuse, they have collectively, in the words of an earlier public servant been the Captains with the Mighty Hearts. They are the embodiment of an old-fashioned value called civic virtue.

I thank them for the opportunity and the support that they have given me.

May their service long endure. Already in conversation with the National Association of State Boards of Education (NASBE), they are undertaking a thoughtful process that will assure an orderly and effective transition in the office of Commissioner.

As for myself, I have never cared for golf. The future will find me elsewhere in the great vineyard of education reform. Some obsessions are hard to put aside. Know this however, that nothing in my experience before or after will equal the hours we have spent together in the golden sun of Colorado.

That said, we have much work to do. Let us go forward together with a strong and active faith.

Sincerely yours,

William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

cc: Governor Ritter, General Assembly, State Board of Education, CDE Cabinet, CDE Staff, BOCES, CASB, CASE, CEA, and CFT