



CHIEFLINE

Colorado Department of Education
William J. Moloney, Commissioner



“The Hopes and Fears of All the Years”

- *Oh, Little Town of Bethlehem*
- *Traditional Christmas Carol*

December 15, 2006

I. IN THE SPIRIT OF THE SEASON: OF FAITH, HOPE, AND CHARITY

As all certainly know, the last few weeks have seen many events of educational significance. Let me just touch on a few of them that stand out at this time of year when we are all in a reflective mood concerning the year just ending and the one just ahead:

November 7th

As all know, a dramatically altered political landscape emerged both nationally and in Colorado. In some ways it parallels the atmosphere of eight years ago when one party – in that period the Republicans – held sway over both the executive and legislative branches. A wider sweep of history harkens all the way back to the late 50's and early 60's – the last time the Democratic Party had such ascendance.

Change also occurs with the State Board of Education, which reverts to seven members as opposed to the eight that have obtained during the last four years. All current members of the State Board of Education remain in place save At-Large Member Jared Polis. As I noted at yesterday's State Board Meeting, Mr. Polis in his time offered a lively presence and many fresh ideas. As is the case with local board members, we should commend him for his willingness to take time away from friends, family, and work to serve the cause of public education. He will no doubt continue that service in other ways for many years to come.

December 1

At its second meeting, the Commissioner's Superintendent Advisory Council (CSAC) focused at length on a concept put before them by Gerry Difford and Phil Fox: Extending current Accreditation Contracts for one year in light of possible legislative changes coming at both the federal and state levels. This idea - basically aimed at reducing workload and to avoid repeating tasks - was also discussed on the same day at the Denver Area School Superintendents Council.

Dr. Difford suggested the strong likelihood that there was sufficient flexibility within the rulemaking authority of the State Board of Education to do this. Accordingly, CSAC unanimously asked that this matter to be sent forward to the State Board for consideration. Phil and Gerry made said presentation to the Board on December 14. The matter will return for further consideration in the context of the proposed rule changes that Gerry has been discussing at all the regional superintendent's councils.

December 5

This day saw the sixth and last press conference held by Governor Owens on the occasion of the release of the School Accountability Reports (SARs). Looking back over the last six years the Governor noted that there were more youngsters in excellent schools than ever before and fewer youngsters in unsatisfactory schools than ever before. Reflecting on his contributions to education reform, Governor Owens gave much credit to his predecessor Governor Romer for establishing the foundation on which he was able to build. His decision to affirm that foundation gave us the continuity and stability that is the great strength of Colorado's reform program.

December 11

If one judges importance simply by the volume of media attention, then clearly the most important educational issue facing the state is online education.

On this day, I and other CDE staff joined the Legislative Audit Committee to review the report and recommendations of the recent audit as well as CDE responses to same.

As you know, opinions of online education range from "wonderful" to "awful." The reasonable middle ground seems to be that it can be a useful option, particularly for at-risk youngsters, but with the important proviso that it is done properly. The upshot of all of this is that CDE is currently working with legislators to craft clearer guidelines for online education and providing necessary resources to allow for adequate oversight of these programs.

December 14

In the same way that Colorado's Age of Reform began with the foundation laid down by Governor Romer, and was extended by the work of Governor Owens, it is natural to hope that this educational "work in progress" can be further extended in the time of to soon to be Governor Ritter.

In an important symbolic gesture that strongly suggested just such continuity and stability, Governor Elect Ritter and Lt. Governor Elect O'Brien this day joined the meeting of the State Board of Education. Heartening indeed were the remarks of the Governor and Lt. Governor Elect and the State Board members suggesting that a strong partnership could be forged to advance the cause of reform.

The test of all of this will come in the new year amidst many things that will be new and different – for example see the attached article "Romanoff Favors Adopting Landmark Education Overhaul" in the Denver Post (12/15/06). However, before any of this comes to pass there lies before us, happily, the end of year holidays. It is possible that part of the wisdom of our Founding Fathers was to have elections just before this time so that citizens could calm and soothe the agitations of the often-contentious electoral process.

In any event, let me wish to all of you both thanks for all you have done for children in this year and the hope that you and your families obtain some well-deserved rest and relaxation.

Sincerely yours,

William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

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

denver & the west

Romanoff favors adopting landmark education overhaul

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Article Last Updated: 12/14/2006 08:37:32 PM MST

Colorado should take the lead in major education reform, borrowing from a landmark national report that calls for high school exit exams and dramatic increases in teacher pay, state House Speaker Andrew Romanoff said Thursday.

The report, heard by a bipartisan panel of lawmakers and educators in Washington, D.C., says America is failing to prepare its students to compete in a global economy.

It calls for ending high school for most students after 10th grade, when they would take "rigorous state board exams." Those who pass could choose to go directly to technical colleges, and the best students could stay in high school to prepare for entrance into elite universities.

The change would save nearly \$60 billion nationwide, a third of which would pay for preschool for all 4-year-olds and low-income 3-year-olds, the report says.

The savings also would go toward training and deploying teachers recruited from the top third of high school students going to college.

The report, from The New Commission on the Skills of the American Workforce, also calls for a complete revamping of education funding.

Independent contractors, operating under contracts managed by local school districts, would run public schools.

Romanoff, D-Denver, a panel member, said he plans to set up a task force of educators and parents to develop a Colorado version of the plan, which would require constitutional and legislative changes.

Sen. Peter Groff, D-Denver, said he would push for an audit of the state's public-school system and propose plans to address the national report.

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