



CHIEFLINE

Colorado Department of Education
William J. Moloney, Commissioner



"The child who can read on grade level will have a reasonable chance at every opportunity that life sends his way. The child who cannot read will be in trouble every step of his life until that handicap is lifted from his shoulders."

July 21, 2006

- Rod Paige
- U.S. Secretary of Education (2001 - 2005)

I. READING: A NEW URGENCY TO THINGS WE HAVE LONG KNOWN

For a very long time we have heard countless teachers say: "Gee, the stuff I really needed to know in the classroom, I didn't hear much about in college." Year after year the Colorado Survey of First and Second Year Teachers reported much the same thing.

Similarly, for many years we heard superintendents and principals lament that many new teachers didn't have the skills needed for success in the classroom. Often they would add, "We have to train or retrain them ourselves."

These concerns have grown and gained a new urgency in recent years as Colorado schools have had to adjust to such things as School Accountability Reports (SARs) and most particularly the pressures associated with No Child Left Behind.

At the same time, we would hear persuasive testimony from The National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD) that 85% of reading teachers lack proper training. This reality was reinforced by the recent report of the National Council on Teacher Quality (NCTQ) "What Education Schools Aren't Teaching About Reading and Elementary Teachers Aren't Learning." For a concise and thoughtful appreciation of this report and its implications see the attached op-ed by Linda Seebach of the Rocky Mountain News, "Teachers Poorly Trained in Reading Can Hamstring Kids."

Also, for a national and historical perspective on how and why the issue of reading instruction has haunted American education for decades, I would recommend the brief but brilliant recent book by E. D. Hirsch – The Knowledge Deficit.

So what is to be done about all of this?

For some thoughts on the approach that the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is taking please see the enclosed letter (5/4/06) that I sent to the 19 Deans of Education at the Colorado Institutions that have teacher

preparation programs. In this letter, I sought to lay out the issues which have led to this heightened sense of urgency around reading and also suggest some cooperative strategies that we could pursue in common for the benefit of Colorado's school children.

While there was an understandable element of defensiveness in the recent meeting that the 19 deans had with the Reading Directorate, at the end of this gathering there was a shared sense that the challenge is just too important to Colorado and its' children for us to become bogged down in counterproductive finger pointing.

I would also note that I have had conversations with many of the presidents of the Colorado colleges and universities about this subject. There is among them an awareness not only that a turning point has been reached for a major enrollment area in their institutions but that no one involved in education can either deny the reality of this problem or walk away from it.

All of us have a shared responsibility in meeting this challenge. If our children – particularly our struggling children of poverty and color – are to be well-served we must work together.

Reading scores in Colorado (CSAP) and across the nation (NAEP) have been flat for a number of years. Though issues such as resources and poverty can always be summoned up to explain some aspects of this challenge the heart of the matter goes to how we are actually teaching reading. If there was any doubt of this, two factors should eliminate that doubt.

First, as Secretary Paige often pointed out, the impoverished, overwhelmingly black, English speaking nations of the Caribbean all have higher literacy rates than the United States. Second, is the example of districts and many schools across Colorado who have made dramatic progress in reading by refocusing and intensifying their instruction in a manner based on sound principles of reading research.

In sum, the bad news is that we face an enormous challenge with profound implications for the future of our state, our nation, and above all our children. The good news is that the path to meeting this challenge is now increasingly clear. Teachers and principals in Colorado and elsewhere have shown the way. Those pioneers must be joined by many others.

II. ADMINISTRATIVE CHANGES AT CDE

In earlier editions of Chiefline (2/17/06 & 5/1/06) we have reported on organizational changes at CDE made as part of our planning for the future. As reported a major theme of these changes is "Harmonizing Mission and Resources."

At this time I would announce two additional changes which will further consolidate and strengthen our organizational profile.

A. Unifying Exceptional Student Services and Center For At Risk Education

With the retirement of David Smith, the long-time head of Prevention Initiatives and later the Center for At Risk Education, we had an opportunity for some significant restructuring. Mr. Smith led this examination and recommended unifying his unit and Exceptional Student Services under the leadership of Dr. Edward Steinberg.

In addition to tighter integration and elimination of overlap, the linking of these two units with similar missions moves CDE into alignment with the configuration of most school districts. This move also unifies

various funding streams for Early Childhood under one umbrella and allows for cost savings that can be invested in other priority areas.

The name of the new unit will be "Center for Exceptional Student Services and At Risk Education."

B. Elimination of the Deputy Commissioner Position

In the year since the retirement of Deputy Commissioner Roscoe Davidson, the Director of our Professional Services (Licensure) Unit Dorothy Gotlieb has heroically filled not one but two jobs. Her willingness to do this was enormously helpful during a transition period that has seen several key personnel changes owing to retirement.

Adding an "extra job" however is not something that can be done indefinitely by one person. With the elimination of the Deputy Commissioner position, the responsibilities pertaining to that office will be more equitably distributed among several senior staff members.

Veteran CDE watchers will recall previous occasions when the Deputy position was unfilled during periods of transition.

Both these changes (A & B) are effective as of July 21, 2006.

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