



Colorado Department of Education
William J. Moloney, Commissioner



"CSAP: KIDS SCORE, STATE WINS"

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I. A BANNER CSAP SEASON: SUCCESS IS BREAKING OUT, ALL OVER

Well, CSAP could not have had a nicer 10th Birthday Party!

After recent years of explaining to Editorial Boards and others the meaning of "flat" scores and "very slow (but very steady) progress", it was a refreshing change to truly have some good things to crow about.

In each of the ten years that I have visited the Editorial Boards prior to the CSAP release, I have stressed to them that the real stories are not at the state but rather the local level, for it is there that we truly learn what is being done in many places and what can be done in many more.

This years statewide surge is simply a reflection of those local success stories reaching critical mass and driving the entire state forward.

This year in school after school, and district after district, dedicated educators were unlocking the mysteries of data analysis and using them to shape instruction and pave the way for the growth of student achievement.

For a decade, CSAP has been both signpost and scorekeeper in the states Age of Reform. This journey has been arduous, sometimes controversial, alternately satisfying and frustrating, but through everything every Colorado educator knew that these efforts were all about the lives of children and no one could or would step away from that high purpose.

The journey continues. With what we have learned to date, we can reasonably hope that the satisfactions will begin to decisively outweigh the frustrations. Yet none should be under any illusion that the road shall always be smooth or that Journeys End is just around the corner.

For today, though, let us celebrate, how the hard work, dedication, and the determination of thousands of Colorado educators has benefited those children who give meaning to all we do.

II. STATE BOARD IN TELLURIDE: OF DATA AND STUDENT ACHIEVEMENT

Meeting on the Western Slope on August 9 and 10, the State Board of Education devoted a full day to the related subjects of data and student achievement.

Knowing that data touches almost the entirety of work of the State Board and the CDE, Chairman Pam Suckla decided that it would be useful to step back and look comprehensively at how CDE gathers, analyzes, and shares data of all kinds. In particular there was a desire to focus on how data connects to achievement at both the state and local level.

Accordingly, the entire morning was spent in a review of CDE data operations.

Chief of Staff Karen Stroup provided an overview of data operations which ranged from the technical challenges that the department deals with, the legal (particularly privacy) constraints that CDE must honor, and how the data operation feeds into the massive task entailed by School Accountability Reports (SARs).

Next, Dr. Dianne Lefly of the Assessment Unit, while confessing herself to be a “usefully obsessive” person, walked us through the entire process of CSAP data management ranging from relations with our publisher CTB-McGraw, to our constant interactions with our local school districts who depend on CDE for distribution and review of data. Needless to say, the dimension of the task – literally millions of tests and tens of millions of “data bites” – is staggering in its volume and complexity.

Finally, Mr. Dan Domagala of our Information Management Systems Unit introduced the Board and the audience to the remarkable and very promising system called CEDAR (Colorado Educational Data Analysis and Reporting). This system, which Dan was able to make understandable, accessible, and friendly to even “low tech” types (like myself) has a particular value for smaller school districts.

The afternoon of this “day of data” was given over to local school districts from the area to present some of the things they were doing to marry data and instruction.

Superintendent Mary Rubadeau of Telluride and her staff presented a historical overview of how her district has organized itself towards a steady lifting of student achievement.

Particularly notable was Telluride’s young physics teacher Seth Berg who in his “spare time” (extra pay for extra duty and some time release) shows up at about the time that all of the CSAP data comes rolling in and magically organizes it in a way that allows him to present to every Telluride teacher a remarkably detailed analysis of what is going on achievement wise with their students. What was particularly impressive about this “Berg Model” is that it is one that could be replicated in any Colorado school district.

Next the Board heard from Superintendent Stacy Houser and his staff from the Montezuma-Cortez School District. He explained how his district, which this year had some of the most extraordinary CSAP gains in the state, organized itself for success. Rallying the local newspaper, chamber of commerce, and community to the cause of student achievement, a bond issue was passed, which among other things, provided literacy coaches. Additional help was provided by Good Neighbor Joyce Bales from Pueblo 60 and from CDE in the person of Assistant Commissioner Jo O’Brien and Regional Manager John Penn. The critical ingredient however, was the leadership of the Montezuma-Cortez Board and Dr. Houser, and the striking commitment of the district’s education professionals.

The contrasts between Telluride and Montezuma-Cortez are considerable but though their approaches and methods may have differed, what they clearly had in common was the determination to make student achievement Job One.

A highlight of the Board’s second day of meetings was the dialog between the SBE and 14 local school directors who acted as spokespersons for the more than 60 such individuals who had been meeting over the last two days in their regional settings.

Led by CASB President John Knapp of Rocky Ford, these local leaders underlined their determination to do whatever it took to move the cause of student achievement. They also expressed their belief in the value of a strong working relationship with the State Board. This impulse towards cooperation it should be noted owes much to the quiet background work done by President John Knapp and SBE Chairman Pam Suckla. Looking toward the future, a further outgrowth of this work by John and Pam is an initiative focusing on small and rural school districts and the special challenges that they face. We hope to have more to report on this in the not too distant future.

III. **SUPERINTENDENTS ADVISORY COUNCIL: IMPROVING COMMUNICATION WITH THE FIELD**

During visits to the five Superintendents Group Meetings (Northern, Southern, Western Slope, Pike's Peak, and Denver Area) this Spring, I raised the issue of forming a Superintendent's Advisory Council to improve CDE's communication with our 178 districts.

The idea which had originated with Superintendents themselves seemed promising. A final affirmation came from the inimitable Jim Wilson at a Southern Supes meeting: "Git 'er done!"

As I have with so many important issues, I turned to Dr. Gerry Difford to brainstorm some ideas about how this initiative could be effectively implemented and also find someone who could take responsibility for it.

Before long, Gerry came back with the idea that the Advisory Council be made up of the Chairpersons (or Co-Chairs) of the historic five Superintendent's Councils and that they would meet regularly (in person or by teleconference) with agenda items which were identified by Superintendents as being of critical importance.

Gerry stressed that he couldn't do this alone and that it would take a special person to make this work – a respected person who knew well and was well known to our 178 Superintendents and who also understood the issues that were important to them.

Just recently, Gerry stopped by my office and with characteristic wit and understatement said the following: "I think I've found the right person, a fellow I hired twenty-two years ago when I was Executive Director of CASE. His name is Phil Fox."

Apparently, those Superintendent leaders who Gerry had informally consulted agreed.

In the very near future Gerry and Phil will be in further communication with the Chairs of the five Superintendent's Groups to develop an agenda that can truly advance the cause of better communication and cooperation between CDE and the field.

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