



Colorado Department of Education
William J. Moloney, Commissioner



"Difficult Facts Must Be Faced."

- Rod Paige
- U.S. Secretary of Education

March 18, 2002

Through the years, periodic "education summits" sponsored by our Governors, have benchmarked the advance of education reform in Colorado.

Governor Romer's last summit in 1998 powerfully reflected the state's concern over the first CSAP results, which had appeared the previous November.

Governor Owens first summit in 2000, which featured Dr. William Sanders, highlighted the need to reform teacher training and was reflective of the recently passed SB-154 which addressed that subject.

Attendees at the 2001 summit heard Ruby Payne and Reverend Floyd Flake eloquently address the needs of poor children – a major theme of SB-186.

The following three items give some flavor of Governor Owens' third Education Summit held last Wednesday in Denver:

I. THE SUMMIT: PAIGE AND OWENS LINK U.S. AND COLORADO REFORM

Preceded by Governor Owens who described a momentous decade of bi-partisan school reform, Secretary Paige hailed Colorado as a national leader in the cause of lifting achievement for all children.

The many superintendents in the audience could take justifiable pride in seeing one of their own elevated to the top education post in the land. The first Secretary to come from the superintendent ranks, Paige's highly successful seven years as Houston's chief allows him to legitimately claim, "I practiced what I preach."

Also, the first African-American to lead the U.S.D.O.E., Paige brings a clear moral force to his insistence that “No Child Be Left Behind” and that “No Excuses” be accepted.

Secretary Paige minced no words in stating, “Difficult facts must be faced” by all of us responsible for education at every level. He eloquently insisted that our problems are not just a matter of wealth and poverty.

He praised highly those many schools already proving that poor children can succeed. He singled out one superintendent in the audience – Dr. Joyce Bales of Pueblo 60 – and noted that six of the twenty schools in Colorado cited nationally by the Education Trust as “succeeding against the odds” were in her district.

At a dinner hosted the previous evening by UNC President Hank Brown, Secretary Paige questioned me closely on our “Closing the Learning Gap” efforts and the programs in Pueblo 60 with which he was quite familiar. He also reinforced his regard for Colorado’s success in those decade long exertions described by Governor Owens.

Overall, it is hard to imagine student achievement in general, or the needs of our poorest children in particular, having a more compelling champion than Rod Paige.

II. THE SUMMIT: OF DATA AND LITERACY

The above noted subjects were at the heart of the summit program.

U.S. Undersecretary of Education Eugene Hickok offered most illuminating thoughts on the importance of good data – a topic certainly familiar to Colorado educators. He particularly stressed the vital need to disaggregate data – to look not just at averages but also at results for identifiable groups.

If audience reaction and lunchtime buzz was any indicator, the clear star of this segment was Dr. G. Reid Lyon, since 1991, the head of the National Institutes of Child Health and Human Development, an arm of the National Institutes of Health.

Since the death of Jeanne Chall, Lyon is arguably the country’s premier authority on reading. Judging by this speech, he should also be a candidate for the Harry Truman Plain Speaking Award! Some highlights from his remarks:

- Most education research is of poor quality, frequently being little more than one person’s experience of a single class or a few students.
- Where research is good, such as in how to teach reading, it is usually unknown or ignored.
- Reading is a complex skill that must be taught in a series of well-defined sequential steps.

- It is estimated that only 10% of teachers know how to teach in this manner
- “People come out (of education schools) having entirely different ideas about how children learn to read – as if graduates of some medical schools took the appendix out from the front and others from the back.”
- 90 – 95% of all children should be reading at grade level if taught correctly. However, only about 65% are at grade level.
- The notion that reading comes naturally to children is the “dumbest idea since the formation of the planet.”
- “Children can’t get to ‘rich authentic literature’ until they can pull print off the page.”
- If children come to school already behind, they must be taught clearly or they will be lost.

III. THE SUMMIT: RAMPING UP FOR HR-1

Central to the Summit and the purpose of Secretary Paige’s visit was a public education process concerning the great importance of the recently signed (1/8/02) landmark Federal legislation HR-1 (“No Child Left Behind”).

Beginning with a 7 a.m. breakfast hosted by Governor Owens for business leaders who heard from Sandy Kress – principal author of HR-1 – the entire day unfolded against a backdrop of the challenges and opportunities of this new legislation.

Readers of the last Chiefline (2/20/02) got a preview of all this in the item “Looking at HR-1: The Ultimate in Federal Education Legislation.”

By our latest count, CDE has sponsored nearly 100 meetings of one kind or another that have dealt with some of the many aspects of HR-1.

So comprehensive is the reach of HR-1 that it touches virtually every unit and sub-unit within CDE. Accordingly, I have charged Bill Windler and Roscoe Davidson to co-chair the coordination effort within CDE and with external entities as well. It should be noted that while most HR-1 activities are in the K-12 realm, there are significant aspects touching post-secondary education as well.

Our activities have been complemented by information efforts by various of the education organizations. Particularly well received have been those series of evening meetings sponsored by CASE.

In addition to the meetings with CASE and CASB on HR-1 cooperation referenced in last month’s Chiefline, I had more recent opportunity to talk with Ron Brady and Phil Moeckli of CEA. Like all the rest of us, they recognize the importance of cooperation in these matters. Their input will be of

particular value as we address the still undefined requirement for “highly qualified teachers” in every classroom.

All in all, it is clear that while Colorado may be “well ahead of the curve” compared to other states as Secretary Paige noted, a great deal of work remains to be done.

UPDATE ON DATA AND SAR WORK GROUP

March 1, 2001 saw the reconvening of the broad-based group, which met originally on December 11, 2001 and launched the very distinguished seven-person work group chaired by Dr. Roscoe Davidson (Chiefline 12/17/01).

The purpose of the March 1 meeting was to review the very impressive report produced by Roscoe's group, generally discuss its 34 recommendations, and opine on next steps.

Since the Denver Post praised the work of Roscoe's group dubbing them “seven of the smartest people in Colorado,” they have endured much good-natured abuse from the rest of us jealous that we have not gained such public acclaim.

Following a bit more such abuse, the Work Group provided an overview of their report and responded to questions.

Listening to Elliot Asp or Beth Celva describe arcana such as, “point five of a standard deviation” most of us were grateful that they were on the committee and we were not. Nonetheless, all praised the highly readable and comprehensible format of the report.

One key recommendation that was discussed at length, involved calculation of the Improvement Grade, which will appear on this year's SAR. Such was the complexity and importance of this issue that the Work Group is convening a Technical Advisory Committee (TAC) to look more closely at the matter. The TAC, which includes such individuals as Professor Robert Linn of CU Boulder, has been of great assistance in the past.

Though the report remains under review by the State Board of Education as a public document, elements of it have already gained notice from key legislators and other interested parties.

It has also gone out to all members of the convening body, including the five Regional Superintendent groups for their review.

Given the scope and complexity of this task, we are under no illusion that everybody – Governor, legislators, State Board, or sponsoring organizations – will agree on every recommendation, or that all of this can be tidied up in the next couple of weeks. Such was never our expectation.

What will happen is that over time the SAR and our other uses of data will be progressively better because of the thoughtful and unified efforts of this group.

CHANGING OF THE GUARD AT CDE

As most of you know by now, Dick Elmer will be concluding his service as Deputy Commissioner on the 31st of this month. Succeeding Dick in that position will be Dr. Roscoe Davidson. Succeeding Roscoe as Assistant Commissioner will be Dr. Gary Sibigroth.

We always knew that one day the call of home and grandchildren would summon Dick back East.

We shall miss him greatly but we are fortunate we have a man like Roscoe to continue that work so important to us all.

In the future, Dick can be found deep in the Adirondack Mountains in a place called Eagle Bay (population: 42 people and several larcenous bears).

In thanking Dick for his "great contributions to the cause of school reform," Governor Owens particularly cited his devotion to "change for the betterment of children even when such was not popular." The Governor was certainly correct in telling Dick, "Colorado is a better place due to your commitment to our wonderful state."

Let the final words be those of the inscription on the plaque presented to Dick by his friends Gerry Difford and Roscoe Davidson:

Richard G. Elmer

Deputy Commissioner of Education

1998 – 2002

A Man To Ride The River With

"His Knowledge, Courage, and Commitment Blazed a Trail for the Children of Colorado."

Sincerely,

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