



Colorado Department of Education
William J. Moloney, Commissioner



***"Strong schools are essential
to a strong country."***

October 8, 2002

- *President George W. Bush
September 17, 2002*

I. CLOSING THE ACHIEVEMENT GAP COALITION MOVES FORWARD

The Coalition had a busy summer.

Principle activities included expanding membership statewide, formalizing links with the State Board of Education and preparing for an end-of-summer strategy session with the Coalition's Co-Chairmen, Governor Owens and Attorney General Salazar.

In addition, there was a continuing focus on the Coalition's four goals (data and accreditation, teacher quality, parent and community relations, and best practices).

The meeting of the Coalition Action Committee with the Governor and Attorney General occurred on August 20, 2002. In a lengthy and productive session, directions were mapped out for the coming year which would build support of the Coalition generally and develop financial support specifically.

The Governor and Attorney General felt that the passage of legislation would be essential to these efforts. They further indicated their willingness to help identify sponsors, draft a bill, and guide the legislation on its journey through the General Assembly.

Both co-chairmen also viewed it as essential that support for the Coalition and the legislation be developed in the wider communities outside of education. Here they saw the business community as an especially valuable potential partner. For an example of this outreach, see the enclosed letter from Governor Owens and Attorney General Salazar to Metro Chamber Executive Joe Blake.

At a Coalition meeting on October 1, 2002, Action Committee Chairman Bill De La Cruz (who is also chairman of the Boulder Valley School Board) reported on these and other activities. He specifically referenced Coalition links to the landmark federal legislation, "No Child Left Behind" (see next story), and also the need for support within the education community.

The leaders of our education organizations have attended Coalition meetings and there is a broad awareness of the importance of this cause. By way of follow-up, I will be writing to them in the near future. The Coalition also plans to share information materials with district leaders as well.

II. “NO CHILD LEFT BEHIND” (HR-1): AN EMERGING PROFILE

We always knew HR-1 was a big deal, but with each passing month we see further evidence that its implications are even larger than we thought.

Gradually states across the nation are adjusting to the complexities and the implications as well. Still, HR-1 has dramatically illustrated that the states are in fifty highly divergent places as regards to the kinds of reform called for in the new legislation.

As noted before, Colorado continues to enjoy an enviable reputation in the implementation of HR-1. As I noted in testimony before Senator Kennedy’s Education Committee, this is not because of any innate cleverness on our part, but rather the fact that Colorado has been consistently pursuing an agenda of standards, assessments, and accountability for nine years.

In the aftermath of having told Colorado’s story before both the Senate and House, one is struck by the resolute determination of Congress that, “No Child Left Behind” will succeed. The public and private remarks of leaders of both parties reveal their unhappiness with the poor compliance with earlier editions of the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (as of 2001, 17 states still had not complied with the 1994 reauthorization).

This determination was further illustrated during a three-hour meeting between Secretary Rod Paige and fifteen state school chiefs in Washington. Repeatedly, Paige reminded us that there would be flexibility regarding implementation but none regarding goals. If further reinforcement was needed, it came the following morning during a White House ceremony in which President Bush stressed the connection between America’s education goals and its national security.

Both in Washington and in Colorado, we have emphasized the valuable convergence between the goals of HR-1 and the goals of our Closing the Achievement Gap Coalition. As our HR-1 implementation unfolds across the state, the potential for partnering with Coalition initiatives is most substantial.

Further to the theme of convergence, we see such things as the growing strength of our Family Literacy Program, the recent \$10 million grant to CDE’s English Language Acquisition Unit – a sign of it’s recognition as a national model – and the increasing partnership activities of the Regional Services Unit, as all being linked by a focus on the needs of our most vulnerable children.

As local people reflect on HR-1, they will find that Colorado’s status as a national leader is not only a legitimate source of pride, but also an assurance that they need have no fear about untoward federal pressures regarding implementation.

Even before HR-1 existed, Colorado had embraced the cause of lifting up our neediest children. Urged on by governors of both parties and bi-partisan majorities in the General Assembly, we have made that cause central to our accreditation process and all other measures of reform.

“Closing the Achievement Gap” is synonymous with “Leave No Child Behind” and Colorado has shown itself to be a “can-do” state.

Make no mistake that closing the gap remains a steep mountain to climb, but we can take courage from the fact that we are united in recognizing this as the great education cause of our time. We are also united in our determination that together we can and will climb that mountain.

Sincerely yours,

William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

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