



COLORADO DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION

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William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

Dorothy Gotlieb
Deputy Commissioner

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Dear Dean of Educational Training Institution (personalized),

I am writing to acquaint you with some procedural changes regarding the approval of Teacher Education Programs by the Colorado State Board of Education (SBE).

Given the practical impact of these changes, I wanted to describe for you, in some detail, the larger issues that have moved the SBE and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) in this direction. Hopefully this will prepare the way for the needed alterations in our historically cooperative relationship.

These issues, I am sure, are quite familiar to you but it is useful to enumerate them in the interest of understanding and clarity. Those issues that weigh most heavily with us are, as follows:

1. **The Achievement Gap**

This is the centerpiece of education reform in Colorado and across the nation. It is increasingly evident that success, or lack thereof, in closing the gap is powerfully conditioned by the interlocking variables of literacy and teacher quality. Therefore, it is appropriate that we all intensify our address to these critical areas.

2. **Accountability**

Inclusive of standards and assessment, there is no doubt, that accountability is the central theme of American education reform today. In Colorado, the passage of the Accreditation/Accountability Act of 1998, School Accountability Reports of 2000, and No Child Left Behind Act of 2002, have transformed the educational landscape and placed accountability at the very top of district and school agendas.

At the heart of this agenda is literacy and mathematics, with literacy the far more prominent issue, as it is the key predictor for success in math.

3. **District Needs**

As they respond to the above noted challenges, districts are increasingly conveying to us their concerns about the effectiveness of teachers who emerge from SBE-approved programs and the CDE licensure process. In effect, what they are saying to us is that, "if you are responsible for approving these programs and licensing these teachers, then you must respond to our concerns about quality."

Now, of course, it should be understood that the representations we receive and the realities that lie behind them are highly variable from institution to institution, program to program, etc. Generalization is sometimes necessary, but it can be difficult. What is beyond question, however, is the growing urgency of the concerns that come to us.

4. Alternative Preparation Programs

As you know, "alternative paths" have become so pervasive that before long they may be more appropriately described as "mainstream."

Among the expressions of this search for alternatives are some districts that have asked for the authority to train and credential independently. Their key justification is that they commonly find themselves in a position of having to retrain the teachers they hire, in light of deficiencies in their training.

"Alternate paths" have their own problems, and by no means are to be viewed as a panacea. Their currency in the reform discussion, however, makes clear the urgency of the needs being felt in the field.

5. State Board of Education (SBE) Priorities

Owing to the economic downturn experienced by our state, CDE, like all other state agencies, experienced dramatic cutbacks including a 25% reduction in state-funded positions. Though the economy may be improving, we are under no illusions that these reductions will be restored in any significant way. Accordingly, the SBE and CDE have had to undertake a searching self-examination, which has required a rigorous prioritization of our overall Constitutional mission.

Literacy, with a particular emphasis on early childhood, is among our very highest priorities. So, too, is the issue of teacher quality.

Seven years ago, the General Assembly passed and Governor Owens signed a bill C.R.S. 23-1-121 co-sponsored by two former members of the State Board – Senator John Evans and Representative Dorothy Gottlieb – which gave to the State Board very broad authority to bring the state's teacher training programs into conformity with the content standards that had been adopted by the State.

In the years immediately following the passage of this landmark legislation, a great deal was accomplished in a cooperative effort between State authorities and the institutions. By no means, however, could we say that this substantial task was completed.

In fairness, it must be said that the cascade of subsequent legislation, notably around accountability became a powerful distraction as regards the work of the State Board and CDE. Nonetheless, at this point in time, the growing urgency of the connected issues of literacy and teacher preparation has led us to renew and intensify our efforts in this area.

It is difficult to overstate the impact of the No Child Left Behind legislation on our 178 school districts. Both the "Highly Qualified Teacher" provisions and the escalating pressures associated with Adequate Yearly Progress (AYP) have altered school level expectations and instructional practice to an extent without precedent in our previous experience.

At this time we are also seeing a similar ferment and potential for change as we approach the reauthorization of the Individual with Disabilities Education Act (IDEA).

Concomitant with these events, we are seeing an ever-growing body of research on reading instruction that is already significantly altering instructional practice in many districts across the State.

Accordingly, it becomes a major responsibility for CDE to see that an ever-growing number of schools are able to benefit from these improved practices which are clearly leading to improved student achievement when they are properly implemented.

Throughout all of this there remains, as always, the high imperative of close cooperation among the teacher training institutions, CDE, and the field. Both past legislation and current impulses from the Governor and the General Assembly further reinforce this imperative.

In order to promote this focus on literacy, we have built a cadre of staff with exceptional credentials in the area of literacy.

This cross-Departmental Reading Directorate is now charged with the responsibility for reviewing and evaluating all applications for program approval in those areas touching on literacy. The Chair of this Colorado Reading Directorate (CRD) is Dr. Debora L. Scheffel.

The work of the CRD is powerfully reinforced by a national Technical Advisory Committee which enables Colorado to track and benefit from the latest and the best work regarding reading across the country.

In light of all of this, the increased scrutiny that we are applying to program approval applications is a logical consequence.

At present, the CRD is developing guidelines for the new program approval process. Over the long term these guidelines will provide you with a context for meeting the new standards for program approval.

During this transition period, CDE will continue to review and evaluate applications for program approval on an individual basis as we have done in the past, albeit through the new lens of the increased scrutiny referenced above.

Applications should be sent as in the past to the CDE Licensure Unit. From there all those touching on literacy will be forwarded to the CRD for review, evaluation and recommendation to me and the SBE.

All questions relating to literacy in this context are best pursued by direct communication with Dr. Scheffel (303.866.6635 or scheffel_d@cde.state.co.us).

I would also note that regarding IDEA and other matters relating to Special Education, Dr. Edward Steinberg, the new head of our Exceptional Student Services unit and a CRD member is available to assist you (303.866.6059 or steinberg_e@cde.state.co.us). Many of you will have known Dr. Steinberg from his long service as Special Education leader in Cherry Creek and on Colorado's Special Education Advisory Council (SEAC). His vision of the centrality of literacy in quality Special Education services has been vital to our state's progress.

Finally, I fully recognize that these changes will involve significant time and effort for you as well as for us. I am confident, however, that the responsiveness and commitment to quality that your institution has demonstrated in the past will enable you to do what needs to be done.

The stakes for you and for us are considerable, but they are far greater for the lives of those children who are the ultimate justification for what we all do.

Thanking you for your past contributions to the educational needs of the State of Colorado, and looking forward to working with you in the future, I remain,

Very Sincerely Yours,

William J. Moloney
Commissioner of Education

Cc: State Board of Education, Commissioner's Cabinet, and Colorado Reading Directorate