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## **News Release**

### ***Commissioner Dwight Jones: “Why CSAP Still Works”***

Colorado Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones today published a column about the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). Media are welcome to publish either version below. For a photo of Commissioner Jones to accompany this column, follow this link: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomm/images/DwightJones.jpg>

[Full Version]

## **Why CSAP Still Works**

By Dwight D. Jones, Colorado Commissioner of Education

Imagine for a moment that the results from the Colorado Student Assessment Program were returned only to parents and teachers to improve instruction for each individual student.

At its core, that’s the essence of CSAP—to see if students are meeting state standards. While other states have lost legal challenges over the validity of their statewide tests, Colorado is fortunate to have an assessment that has provided educators, policymakers and taxpayers with accurate information about student achievement for 11 years.

Just a few years after being introduced, CSAP results were considered so legitimate they were used to form the heart of the accountability systems for state (School Accountability Ratings and accreditation status) and federal (No Child Left Behind) governments.

Since there are two fundamental uses for CSAP results, let's separate the discussion into two questions. The first question is whether the test is geared to the right standards for students. I think the answer is "the standards need updating and once the update is complete, the state will likely need an updated assessment, too." The second question is whether we should use CSAP results to place schools on track for punitive measures if they don't improve. I think the answer is "we owe it to students to keep taking a hard look and doing everything we can to support schools where achievement continually falls below expectations."

Prior to the introduction of CSAP, the state's approach to accountability was patchwork. Each district selected its own assessments. Comparisons between school systems were challenging, at best. Schools and districts could hide behind averages.

CSAP changed that. It provided consistent information from Trinidad to Fort Collins, from Wray to Grand Junction. Results revealed some tough truths about school performance. That's the sign of a good accountability system doing its job. From the federal government's system through No Child Left Behind, the results revealed that many school districts weren't reaching all their populations. Again, the accountability system put the spotlight on students who needed more of a boost.

CSAP results played a key role when I worked as a district superintendent. The data was critical to spotting gaps in achievement associated with race and income. I used the data to ask questions of schools and identify successful strategies. Principals statewide use the data to drive school improvement planning. Parents use CSAP results—and deserve the results—as an indicator of progress.

Some of the discussions about CSAP are based on faulty information. One criticism is that CSAP eats up lots of class time. From my perspective, that's not true. Students take up to 12 hours of CSAP in grades five, eight and ten. In those grade levels, that's three hours each in reading, writing, math and science. Students in grades three, four, six, seven and nine take nine hours of tests (because no science tests are given in those years). In all, CSAP requires about 1 percent of a student's time during the school year.

Is CSAP too expensive? The statewide testing program costs \$18 million. Each test costs about \$11 to administer and process. For example, the costs for a student taking four tests (reading, writing,

math and science) would be \$44. That's a small price to check and see if the student is on track.

As the General Assembly passes the half-way point in its deliberations this year, a number of proposals have surfaced that would begin to dismantle CSAP. I believe caution is in order. There are some issues below the surface of CSAP that are less visible and quite substantial, like an iceberg.

One issue is the Colorado Growth Model. Following the lead of the Colorado State Legislature and two bills that received strong bipartisan support, staff at the Colorado Department of Education recently unveiled a new tool that will soon enable parents, schools, districts, and the state to understand how individual students are progressing from year to year and provides a common, statewide means to understand how much growth is needed for each student to reach post-secondary readiness.

The data that fuels this tool is generated by CSAP and draws on year-to-year, student-by-student information. Swapping out CSAP for another test in grades eight through 10, as has been proposed, would render much of our data useless.

The second issue is federal accountability. The federal No Child Left Behind legislation requires states to have tests in place that are aligned to standards, produce valid results and generate the data required to measure Adequate Yearly Progress. The AYP philosophy, I believe, has compelled schools to discuss the needs of every child. That has been an extremely positive step. Swapping out CSAP for another test could jeopardize federal funding and could prove costly. States such as Michigan and Illinois have spent considerable time, effort and money to align new tests with federal requirements. They still lack final approval.

To repeat, it is time for thoughtful changes to CSAP. The current standards need to be updated. The changes in our world in the past 11 years are substantive. What's taught in the classroom must prepare students for their first day after graduation and the current standards may not reflect the world they will soon meet.

We are already working on this review. The State Board of Education joined me in announcing the review of standards last September. The vote was unanimous. We announced also that the review of standards would lead, quite naturally, to changes in the CSAP test itself. The understanding was that the standards review would be done first.

Adjustments should be made after new standards are adopted, not before. Adjustments need to be made so that the growth model can generate useful results and so federal accountability remains intact.

I am a user of CSAP. I believe in the results it generates. I believe it's important to maintain a strong statewide accountability system for students and schools. Common sense suggests we should fix what needs fixing, build on what we've learned and continue to make improvements.

[Abridged Version]

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It is time for thoughtful changes to CSAP. The current standards need to be updated. The State Board of Education joined me in announcing the review of standards last September. We announced also that the review of standards would lead, quite naturally, to changes in the CSAP test itself. The understanding was that the standards review would be done first.

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**For more information, contact** Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.

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