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News Release

Commissioner Dwight Jones Thanks Gov. Bill Ritter and Legislators for Support

Commissioner Dwight D. Jones expressed thanks today to state lawmakers and Gov. Bill Ritter for backing the work of the Colorado Department of Education and the initiatives embedded in “Forward Thinking,” the plan launched last fall to increase the graduation rate and close the achievement gap in all Colorado schools.

The state legislature completed its 2008 session earlier this month and approved a series of bills, including the state’s fiscal year 2009 budget, containing direct support of CDE plans.

“On behalf of the entire Department of Education and school districts across the state, we appreciate the support and the collaboration on these priority needs,” said Commissioner Jones. “We recognize that there are many more requests for resources than can be filled and we are thankful for the investment in these improvements.”

Approved legislation includes:

- Senate Bill 212, also known as The Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), sets in motion a multiyear process of creating a seamless system of standards, expectations and assessments from preschool through postsecondary and workforce readiness. The bill establishes a process for choosing new statewide tests and revising college entrance requirements. “The next generation of standards-based education must consider the needs of the whole student by creating a rich and balanced

curriculum,” states the legislative declaration portion of SB212. “The next generation of standards-based education must also take into account the fact that, while all students must be well prepared for active citizenship, different students will have different career aspirations; some will seek higher education upon graduation; some will seek career or technical training to pursue a particular vocation; others will immediately seek to enter the workforce.”

- House Bill 1386, creating a new Principal Leadership Academy within CDE. The academy will provide comprehensive leadership and professional training to qualified persons for leadership in public schools. The academy is charged with providing a comprehensive leadership and professional development system that identifies, recruits, trains and inducts qualified persons for leadership positions in public schools.
- House Bill 1335, which is expected to generate \$500 million in new capital construction money for school districts that need it the most. Local matching grants are expected to raise another \$400 million or more, bringing the total pot of money available close to \$1 billion in all. The Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) legislation leverages existing revenues to finance lease-purchase agreements that will result in fixing old schools and building new ones. The projects will focus on health and safety-related concerns and be geared to help districts too poor to pay for the construction on their own.
- Senate Bill 130, which allows a public school or group of schools to submit an “innovation plan” to its board of education. The innovations may include the delivery of educational services, personnel administration and decision-making and budgeting. The bill requires the local school board to review each proposal—and affords local boards the option of initiating a plan in collaboration with one or more schools. Plans approved by the local boards of education would be submitted to the commissioner of education and the state board of education for final approval. The bill directs approval of the plan unless it can be shown that the plan would likely result in lower academic achievement or if the plan is fiscally unfeasible.
- House Bill 1370, creating a three-year school counselor corps grant program to increase the number of school counselors for secondary students. The legislation directs the Colorado State

Board of Education to adopt rules to implement the program. Funds will be available for this purpose through school districts, boards of cooperative services and charter schools.

- House Bill 1168, which directs the addition of financial literacy standards to the mathematics content standards. The bill requires the state standards and assessments development implementation council, the state board and schools districts to add financial literacy standards and to recommend and adopt assessments that are aligned with the new financial literacy standards.
- House Bill 1344 will change the response time for the department in processing request for background checks of prospective employees. The new language requires the department of education to respond to a background query within 10 business days. The bill directs a school district board of education to report to the department of education within 10 business days after a dismissal or resignation on particular misconduct. The bill waives sovereign immunity and the notice requirement for an action arising out of a school district's or the department of education's failure to perform an education employment required background check. The bill also eliminates the statute of limitations for a civil action based on a failure to perform an education employment required background check by a school district or the department of education prior to hiring an individual who will work with children or in a setting with children.

Through a variety of legislation, the legislature also provided funding for new functions such as support for content specialists (mathematics, science, social studies and the arts) and an initiative designed to focus on closing achievement gaps associated with race and poverty.

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

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