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News Release

Colorado State Board of Education Approves BEST Grant Recommendations; Two “Innovation School” Proposals Given Green Light

The Colorado State Board of Education this week unanimously approved 11 capital improvement projects under the Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) grant program.

The recommendations were forwarded by the Public School Capital Construction Assistance Board, which approved this slate of projects in February.

In all, the cost of the completed projects is estimated to be \$98.5 million with \$76.5 million being funded through the BEST grant program. The balance comes from a variety of sources, including local school district matching funds.

The 11 approved projects are:

- Alamosa School District RE-11J; two new elementary schools will replace three elementary schools
- Sangre De Cristo School District RE-22J; new P-12 school
- Centennial School District R-1; new P-12 school (supplemental)
- Edison School District 54-JT; new elementary school (supplemental)
- Buffalo School District RE-4; junior/senior high school renovation/addition (supplemental)
- Weldon Valley School District RE-20(J); core area remodel, physical education and athletic facilities upgrade (supplemental)

- Holly School District RE-3; partial roof replacement (supplemental)
- Pueblo City Schools; final phase to district-wide fire and security (supplemental)
- Sargent School District RE-33J; new junior/senior high school and elementary school renovation
- South Routt School District RE-3; district-wide HVAC replacement with renewable technology (supplemental)
- Mountain Valley School District RE-1; roofing and repair under designed structure (supplemental)

The BEST legislation increases the level of financial assistance provided to school districts, charter schools, institute charter schools, the Colorado School for the Deaf and Blind, and Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) for capital construction projects, particularly in those school districts that can't afford to meet their own needs.

The function of the Public School Capital Construction Assistance Board is to protect the health and safety of persons using public school facilities and to maximize student achievement by ensuring public school facilities provide a safe and uncrowded environment that is conducive to student learning.

For more information on the BEST project recommendations, visit: <http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdefinance/CapConstMain.htm>

Innovation Schools

Another unanimous vote supported passage of Denver Public Schools' Innovation Schools Act Application on behalf of two of its schools, Manual High School and Montclair School of Academics and Enrichment.

The requested designations were the first ever under Senate Bill 08-130, approved by the Colorado State Legislature to support greater school autonomy and flexibility in academic and operational decision-making. The law provides a means for schools and districts to gain waivers from state laws and collective bargaining agreements.

Board member Elaine Gantz Berman noted that the proposal would yield waivers of 40 state statutes, 32 district policies and 18 provisions from the district's collective bargaining agreement.

Manual High School Principal Rob Stein told the state board his staff has an “extraordinarily strong and passionate commitment to what’s best for students,” but the “environment is so over-regulated, it’s hard to focus on our mission.”

The proposals drew enthusiastic support from state board members.

State Board Vice-Chair Randy DeHoff lauded Denver Public Schools for learning from its charter schools. “We need to get back to the point of giving people the responsibility and authority to do the job we ask them to do,” he said. “Some of us are very excited about this opportunity.”

Board Member Angelika Schroeder asked for further analysis once the schools have operated for a year or two to learn what can be applied for all schools. “What can we change overall, rather than just have individual schools do this?” she asked.

Board Chair Bob Schaffer held up a copy of *Colorado School Laws* and encouraged that “every one of these statutes has to be evaluated from A to Z” for relevancy, value and overall cost. “Our schools are being crushed by rules, regulation and bureaucracy,” he said. “Thank you for bringing this to us.”

Other Action

In other action, the state board approved:

- Four disciplinary proceedings
- Requests for initial emergency authorizations (11 total)
- Request for one emergency renewal authorization
- Decision concerning appeal from administrative law judge’s initial decision, case no. ED2008-0002
- Procedures for appeal to the state board pursuant to ECEA (Exceptional Children’s Education Act) Rule 7.0.7.
- Adopted amendments to the rules for the operation of school transportation vehicles, 1CCR 301-26
- Notice of rulemaking and repeal of certain rules pertaining to the State Library

- Notice of rulemaking for rules concerning the administration of Colorado Data Reporting for School Accreditation
- Notice of rulemaking of amendments to the Public School Finance Act of 1994 regarding passing time and request to hold a hearing in August 2009

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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