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## **News Release**

### ***Commissioner Dwight Jones Thanks Gov. Bill Ritter, Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien and Members of the 2009 Colorado State Legislature for Support***

Commissioner Dwight D. Jones today thanked state lawmakers and Gov. Bill Ritter for supporting legislation that strengthens the state's position in applying for needed federal "Race to the Top" funds and improves the learning opportunities and classroom environment for students across Colorado.

"Bills produced by the 2009 legislative session will return significant dividends," said Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones. "During a challenging budget year, state legislators and the governor's office have continued to support K-12 education and the reforms being undertaken by the department. The work of the legislature this year shows continued support for strong accountability for schools and some new ideas that will make it much easier for parents and all community members to track and evaluate school performance."

Commissioner Jones also thanked Lt. Gov. Barbara O'Brien for her effort spearheading Colorado's bid for the "Race to the Top" federal grant funds. "Lt. Governor O'Brien has set high standards for bold thinking as the work begins on writing a top-notch application," said Commissioner Jones. "We deeply appreciate her leadership and inspiring challenges around these important discussions."

In particular, Senate Bill 08-163 formally incorporates the Colorado Growth Model as the foundation for school accountability and accreditation measures.

"For too long in Colorado parents and all community members have been presented with conflicting and confusing messages about school performance," said Commissioner Jones. "Senate Bill 163 takes a giant leap forward in restoring order to how school performance data are presented. Even better, the new accreditation process will be grounded in the only measure that makes sense, and that's the progress of individual students over time as compared with others who began at the same level of achievement. It's a fair measurement of the value schools add to each student's learning experience and the new system may shine a light on some schools that are succeeding at some of the most challenging work."

Commissioner Jones also noted as significant the passage of House Bill 09-1243, creating the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement to reduce dropout rates and increase graduation rates, and the passage of House Bill 09-1319, creating the nation's first statewide dual enrollment plan that allows high school students to simultaneously earn a high school degree and a college associate's degree.

"I would also like to commend outgoing Senate President Peter Groff for his leadership and I wish him well in his new role at the U.S. Department of Education," said Commissioner Jones. "It's reassuring somebody who cares so much about all students will play such a key role."

Other key legislation approved this year:

**House Bill 09-1046: Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness Assessments Pilot**

This bill continues support of the postsecondary and workforce readiness assessments pilot program.

**House Bill 09-1057: Parental Leave**

This bill allows an employee of a company with at least 50 employees to take unpaid leave for the purpose of attending parent-teacher conferences or other academic activities related to the educational advancement of the employee's child. The bill provides unpaid leave up to six hours per month and 40 hours in any academic year.

## **House Bill 09-1063: In-state Tuition Status for Certain Parents**

This bill provides in-state student status for tuition purposes to a child whose parent or legal guardian moves to Colorado for a job if the child is a legal resident of the United States, if the child's parent or legal guardian and the child move to Colorado during the child's senior year of high school; and if the child graduates from a Colorado public high school.

**House Bill 09-1065: Educator Identifier Pilot Program**

This bill creates an educator identifier pilot program in the department of education. The final version of the bill assures that information from the pilot may not be used to negatively sanction educators.

**House Bill 09-1240: Colorado Teacher of the Year Program**

This bill creates the Colorado Teacher of the Year Program in CDE to recognize and reward the teacher named "Colorado Teacher of the Year" pursuant to the program coordinated through the national teacher of the year program. The bill requires the State Board of Education to adopt rules for the implementation of the program, including the rewards, duties, and opportunities for the teacher named Colorado teacher of the year. The bill also creates a fund and authorizes the department to solicit and accept gifts, grants, and donations to fund the program.

**Senate Bill 09-230: Charter Schools as School Food Authorities**

This bill allows for more flexibility for charter schools and their choices of food providers (for those schools that participate in the federal food reimbursement program).

**Senate Bill 09-237: Grounds for Mandatory Expulsion from a Public School**

This bill permits, rather than requires, a school district to suspend or expel a student for brandishing an artificial firearm.

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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