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## **News Release**

### ***State Board of Education Honors Four Outstanding Colorado Educators***

Four outstanding educators were honored today by the Colorado State Board of Education—two from the online school community and two nationally recognized teachers of foreign languages.

#### **Online Teachers**

Christina Narayan, of Branson School Online, and DeeAnn Chasirik, of Colorado Online Learning, were recognized as teachers who are highly skilled at online teaching and meritorious of being named Colorado's Online Teacher of the Year.

The Online Teacher of the Year Award is given to recognize educators who use technology tools to teach at a distance. Online teachers need unique instructional, communication and technical skills not necessarily required of teachers in a face-to-face setting. Narayan represented elementary schools; Chasirik represented secondary schools.

Narayan wrote in her application: "I believe in supporting the whole child and I feel that connecting is one of the most important ways to do this. I want my students to feel comfortable and safe in our online classroom. ..I desire for my students to feel connected to me, their classmates and our school."

Narayan is a kindergarten and first grade teacher. Branson School Online is a public, online school that serves students in grades K–12. The school operates in an alternative setting and with a brick and mortar school in a traditional school setting.

Narayan was selected in part because of her vision for supporting the whole child. At the end of every school year Narayan creates a summer reading plan based on final assessment results so students can continue to achieve new reading levels over the summer.

Chasarik teaches English and business education at Colorado Online Learning. Colorado Online Learning (formerly Colorado Online School Consortium) began in 1998 as a joint venture between 14 rural, suburban, and urban school districts in Colorado. With 35 online teachers, Colorado Online Learning remains the largest statewide provider of supplemental online courses.

Chasarik believes reaching out to her students involves several strategies: teaching in a cultural context; providing access to field experiences and technology through projects; and making subject matter relevant to real life.

Chasarik wrote, "When students receive autonomy through online teaching methods and are encouraged to be self-directed learners, students will have the skills necessary to enable them to continue to succeed throughout their life span in our global economy."

### **Foreign Language Teachers**

The board recognized Thompson School District teacher Toni Theisen for being named the 2009 National Foreign Language Teacher by the American Council on the Teaching of Foreign Languages.

The award, sponsored by ACTFL and publisher Holt McDougal, was created to recognize a foreign language teacher who exhibits excellence in language teaching. The selection process includes the submission of a portfolio and a teaching video. Nominees are first evaluated by their state language organization, after which each state submits its top candidate to one of five regional committees for additional review. Regional winners are evaluated and interviewed by ACTFL's awards committee.

Theisen was one of five regional winners from around the United States who were finalists for the national award. Theisen's career spans more than 30 years of teaching at the middle and high school levels. Her areas of specialization include differentiating instruction to meet the needs of all learners, multiple intelligences and integrating technology into instruction.

Theisen was Colorado's first world language National Board Certified Teacher and has served on the ACTFL Board of Directors.

Janine Erickson was also recognized by the state board for her role as the 2009 ACTFL President. Erickson was elected ACTFL president-elect in 2008 and assumed the role in 2009. She retired last year after 23 years of teaching both advanced placement Spanish language and literature at Horizon High School in Thornton.

Erickson also has worked as honorary faculty of the University of Colorado at Denver, where she teaches Spanish in the CU Succeeds Gold Program. Previously, she taught English as a second language at IBM in Valencia, Spain.

Erickson also has served as co-chair of the State World Language Advisory Council (SWLAC), which advises and facilitates the improvement and development of policies and practices that impact foreign language education in Colorado. She has been honored with the UNC Excellence in Teaching Award, the Genevieve Overman Memorial Service Award, the national Spanish Teacher of the Year Award and induction into the City of Thornton's 50th Anniversary Golden Hall of Fame for her contribution to education.

Erickson told the board during a brief presentation that "no student should reach the top and be monolingual" and Thiesen also encouraged strong foreign language standards that provide high school graduates with "the skills they need in the 21st century."

Both Theisen and Erickson are involved in the Phase III model content standards revision and serve on the World Language Subcommittee. Theisen, in fact, is the chair of that subcommittee.

Barbara Medina, Assistant Commissioner at CDE for Language, Culture and Equity, said "an alignment of the stars" brought both the ACTFL president and the national teacher of the year to Colorado in the same year.

**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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