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News Release

Commissioner Dwight D. Jones Encourages Parent Participation in Key Study of Core Knowledge Charter Schools

Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones today encouraged parent participation in an important study of Core Knowledge charter schools in Colorado.

"Core Knowledge" charter schools are charter schools that have adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum, a grade-by-grade core of common learning in English, reading, mathematics, science, history, geography, music and visual arts that is intended to establish a strong foundation of knowledge and ensure that children comprehend subjects in later grades.

The Core Knowledge curriculum was created by author E.D. Hirsch, Jr., who founded the Core Knowledge Foundation as an independent, nonprofit and nonpartisan organization in 1986. There are approximately 740 schools nationwide that have adopted the Core Knowledge curriculum.

The study is being led by David W. Grissmer and Thomas G. White, researchers at the University of Virginia's Curry School of Education. They have received a \$4.9 million grant to evaluate the effectiveness of Core Knowledge charter schools in Colorado. The Colorado Department of Education is participating as a full partner.

The five-year grant is being funded by the Institute of Education Sciences, part of the U.S. Department of Education. Grissmer, a

principal research scientist, and White, a senior scientist, work at the Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning, a national center that focuses on the quality of teaching and students' learning.

"This study holds tremendous potential as a definitive work that will analyze the key ingredients of these successful schools," said Commissioner Jones. "Because the study design requires participation from parents who win lottery-based enrollment to Core Knowledge charter schools—and those who don't win those lotteries—I am strongly encouraging parents to participate in the study to help us all better understand the elements that make these schools effective."

Parents who do not secure a seat in the Core Knowledge charter schools and who agree to participate in the study will be asked to allow ongoing academic testing of their children as they pursue their education in other schools. Information and invitations will be sent to parents who are seeking enrollment of their child in kindergarten in one of the schools in the fall of 2010.

"This project is a major effort of the University of Virginia, Curry School of Education's Center for Advanced Study of Teaching and Learning," said Robert Pianta, Dean of the Curry School. "There have been several smaller-scale and less-well-controlled evaluations of Core Knowledge that suggest it has benefits for children's learning and achievement, but this will be the most comprehensive and well-controlled study to examine its effects."

The research has national importance, Grissmer said, because 3 percent to 5 percent of elementary students are enrolled in charter schools, many of which use the Core Knowledge curriculum.

"Starting a charter school is like opening a complex nonprofit from scratch," Grissmer said. "Some are opened by different groups of parents, and with Core Knowledge they have a ready-made curriculum they can use."

Grissmer and White will focus on at least 18 charter schools where the students are selected by lottery; the list of schools in the study is still being finalized. There are 55 charter schools in Colorado currently using the Core Knowledge approach.

The study presents a unique opportunity for rigorous research because the participants and non-participants are randomly selected.

Grissmer and White will examine students starting kindergarten and follow them for four years, assessing reading skills, oral vocabulary, listening comprehension, science, social studies, mathematics and writing. They will also conduct teacher surveys and classroom observations.

The project will also look at how scores on the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) administered by the state of Colorado are impacted by enrollment in Core Knowledge charter schools.

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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