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News Release

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DPS Deserves Credit for Addressing Student Needs

By Dwight D. Jones, Commissioner of Education

It's been said that *insanity* is defined as doing the same things in the same ways and expecting different results. Yet that's what we in education have done for years. We have known what it takes to reform education, but have not been willing to turn that knowledge into action. Today, however, we've a few forces working in our favor.

First, we know more about improvement initiatives that work. Second, the U.S. Department of Education will allocate significant funds to schools that take bold, aggressive steps and use the most recently proven practices to improve schools. And, third, teachers have greater access to the tools they need to better meet the needs of students.

Recently, Denver Public Schools held regional meetings to announce some bold steps it is taking to effect change in a few of its most struggling schools. Parents and teachers alike were and continue to be frustrated. As a father of three, I completely understand. No one, whether parent, teacher, principal, district administrator or even Realtor, wants to close a school or dramatically change it. I get that.

Years ago I had to go so far as to close a couple of schools in inner-city Baltimore. Revamping the curriculum or hiring different teachers wasn't sufficient. No amount of time will lessen my memories of the

parents, teachers and community members who attended those meetings.

But just as I asked those Baltimore parents, I ask you: “When faced with data that shows your child’s low achievement, upon realizing your child is making little progress from year to year, and knowing that the school has not produced adequate student achievement in many years, would you knowingly choose to continue sending your child into the same “learning” environment?”

You wouldn’t. I wouldn’t.

To its credit, DPS refuses to continue doing business as usual. Instead, the district is seizing an opportunity presented by U.S. Secretary of Education Arne Duncan to adopt one of four specific change models that are designed to turn around performance – and receive sufficient resources to do so.

The models include:

- **School closure**, where the district closes the school and enrolls its former students in other high-achieving schools.
- **Turnaround** implements a new governance structure and a new or revised instructional program, and replaces the principal and at least 50 percent of the school’s staff.
- **Transformation** is similar to turnaround, except that fewer staff members are replaced and greater investment is made in the parts of the program that work.
- **Restart** begins with a school closure or a phase-out. After a rigorous review and selection process, the school is reopened under new management (by a charter school operator or other educational management organization).

Drastic times indeed call for drastic measures, and never in education has this been more true. No one doubts that implementing any of these options will be difficult, but to ignore the data and disregard what the facts reveal is to do more of what we’ve always done. The circle is truly vicious.

Leaders in Denver and in districts across the state agree that all our students deserve better – especially those in our lowest-performing schools. I share and applaud their commitment.

In the coming months, we at the Colorado Department of Education will partner with other districts in their turnaround efforts, just as we support DPS.

We will vigorously support efforts to substantially and sustainably increase student achievement.

We will continue to work to grow and develop the number of talented teachers, principals and community partners that will implement these changes and turn schools around.

We will serve as an advocate to protect the local districts' freedoms to implement innovative and proven approaches in their schools. We will closely monitor results so that we can quickly implement new tactics if initial efforts are not sufficient.

And we will celebrate and reward success.

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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