



Colorado Department of Education – Communications Office
201 East Colfax Ave.
Room 103
Denver, CO 80203
Phone: 303-866-3898
Fax: 303-866-6938

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News Release

(* With corrected telephone number)

***Colorado Department of Education Announces Request
For Information From Educational Service Providers
To Assist With School Turnaround Efforts***

The Colorado Department of Education today published a Request for Information in the effort to identify proven educational service providers to work on the effort to turn around struggling schools. Information is due by Friday, Dec. 11.

Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones said the effort to partner with educational service providers is urgent.

“The Colorado Department of Education believes that all students should have high-quality school opportunities,” said Commissioner Jones. “Despite the best efforts of hard working leaders and teachers, some schools in our state fail to achieve this goal. As a department, we are obligated to respond with swift action on behalf of the children in failing schools.”

With the funds provided through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Commissioner Jones said CDE is poised to partner with school districts in the development of a comprehensive approach to dramatically improve the state’s persistently lowest performing schools.

The department is committed to supporting sustainable efforts to turn around chronically low-performing schools identified for improvement, corrective action or restructuring under Title I of the federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).

Recently, the U.S. Department of Education announced an opportunity for states and school districts to access unprecedented resources for reforms that increase graduation rates, reduce dropout rates, improve instructional quality and create a challenging learning environment where students excel academically.

Only the most rigorous interventions that hold the promise of rapid improvement for student achievement will be implemented under the terms of the school improvement grants made possible through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act.

To that end, CDE is seeking information from educational service providers that offer research-proven services to assist schools in implementing effective, intensive turnaround interventions and measuring their progress toward achievable, sustained outcomes.

The complete Request for Information document is posted on the CDE Web site at this address:

www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/TurnaroundRFIFINAL.pdf

The RFI invites responses from organizations that are interested in assisting CDE and local districts by providing assistive services to leaders and teachers in eligible schools. It also invites responses from organizations that are interested in serving as comprehensive providers to eligible schools through assistance on multiple aspects of school operations.

Organizations that are selected as a result of this process will be included on CDE's 2009-2010 list of School Turnaround Providers.

The purpose of the list is to provide a resource for districts that choose to:

- Partner with CDE in the implementation of one of the four intervention models provided in the draft guidance for the use of federal Title I 1003(g) funds.
- Increase the academic achievement of all students attending the targeted school(s) as measured by the state's assessment system.
- Utilize the support and services from state-approved turnaround providers in their efforts to accomplish the above.

CDE will disseminate the School Turnaround Providers list to Colorado schools and districts to support their selection of turnaround providers for identified schools.

It is expected that providers that are included on the 2009-2010 list will be available to assist eligible schools during the current school year (2009-2010). Inclusion on the list, however, does not guarantee that an organization will be chosen to serve districts or schools. Similarly, this RFI process does not carry an award of state funds. Providers must continue to meet established criteria to remain on the list.

Districts that choose to work with a provider(s) on the list will thereafter enter into a performance-based contract with the provider that outlines clear, measurable outcomes for all aspects of the provider's assistance. Continuation of services to a district will be contingent upon the provider's ability to meet or exceed the performance expectations specified in the contract.

Eligible Service Providers

Eligible entities include for-profit and non-profit organizations such as:

- Education Management Organizations
- Charter school operators or Charter Management Organizations
- Institutions of Higher Education
- Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES)
- Other companies, groups or organizations that have a prior history of successfully raising student performance through services provided to public schools.

Eligibility Requirements

In its response to this RFI, a school turnaround provider is required to:

- Demonstrate its capacity to offer services that have been shown to be effective in increasing achievement among student populations similar to those in eligible Colorado schools.

- Demonstrate that its services are aligned with state academic standards (Colorado Model Content Standards are available at http://www.cde.state.co.us/index_stnd-access.htm).
- Demonstrate the organization's or group's strong fiscal health.
- Provide a detailed budget estimate for provision of services.
- Pledge that instructional programs will be secular, neutral and non-ideological.

Colorado's School Turnaround Efforts

Five areas form the basis for the Colorado Turnaround Framework.

They are:

1. Organizational structure and instructional leadership

Highly skilled leadership embedded throughout an organization is the key to sustainable improvement efforts. Successful schools have leaders who can unite individuals around common goals while supporting them with sufficient resources and training to achieve them. Likewise, successful organizations are able to provide appropriate resources for the ongoing development of its leaders and a menu of resources that allow them to focus on the work of student achievement.

2. Academic performance

All leaders and providers in turnaround schools will be held accountable for achieving rapid improvements in student learning. Providers will need a thorough understanding of standards-based education, inclusive of the selection and periodic review of culturally relevant and rigorous curriculum, research-proven instructional strategies, and assessments intended to inform teachers on student learning. In an effective school, achievement results are systematically monitored and interventions immediately employed to prevent failure.

3. Learning environment

Creating a positive learning environment is best approached by the unified efforts of the entire school community and employs the resources of all invested stakeholders. It will take the collaborative efforts of the district, school, community, external partners and CDE to redesign schools that support the holistic needs of all children. Successful schools also employ fair and

meaningful evaluation processes while instituting professional development and deploying resources that foster a high-performing professional community.

4. Financial efficacy

The appropriate management of financial resources to support school improvement work will result in academic gains. Successful educational organizations are fiscally responsible in the execution of publicly funded monies and seek additional resources when necessary to enhance the goals of the school.

5. Comprehensive planning

The ability to create a cohesive strategic plan that aligns resources with research-proven improvement actions is one of the most challenging efforts in improving schools. There will always be numerous, competing needs and seldom enough resources to address them all. Successful schools engage stakeholders in a process of continual improvement where decisions are based on data and challenging but achievable goals are monitored, evaluated and celebrated when achieved.

A training session will be provided for interested provider applicants on December 1, 2009 in Denver. Additional information about the training location and times will be forwarded upon RSVP to Vernita Mickens, mickens_v@cde.state.co.us. Additional questions may also be sent to her using that e-mail address or by calling 303-866-6675*.

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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