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News Release

Colorado Partners With Mass Insight; Three-Year, \$75 Million Public-Private Partnership Will Focus On Low-Performing Schools

Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones announced today that Colorado will participate in a three-year, \$75 million public-private partnership designed to bring sustainable strategies to turning around low-performing schools.

The partnership is with Mass Insight Education & Research Institute, the non-profit organization that published the ground-breaking 2007 report, "The Turnaround Challenge."

Colorado will be one of six partner states in the effort along with Delaware, Illinois, Louisiana, Massachusetts and New York.

"The partnership with Mass Insight will do two things that are important in this very challenging work," said Commissioner Jones. "First, it will bring a significant increase in resources. Second, the Partnership Zone approach will help districts and schools make sound decisions and build plans to sustain changes after the initial three years of work. The Mass Insight model plans for success and manages resources for maximum impact. These are fundamental changes targeted at interrupting the cycle of under-performance."

Commissioner Jones said the Mass Insight work will be conducted in harmony with districts and schools. "We are very excited about this innovative approach," he added.

Planning and development for the Partnership Zone Initiative is being funded with a \$1.5 million, two-year grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York, along with a partial match from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

Mass Insight and its partners are planning to raise an additional \$30 million of private funding for the three-year initial program and further funding for a two-year extension to match \$45 million of school-level public funding. Public funds will flow through federal School Improvement Grants and, if Colorado's application is successful, through the competitive Race to the Top grant process.

Commissioner Jones noted that Colorado's education policy is well-positioned for the Partnership Zone work. The Innovation Schools Act (S.B. 08-130) allows schools to seek greater autonomy and flexibility in academic and operational decision-making. The law provides a means for schools and districts to gain waivers from state laws and collective bargaining agreements in order to implement needed reforms and it also allows a local school board to initiate work with one or more schools in the district to create innovation plans or innovation school zones.

Additionally, the Education Accountability Act (S.B. 09-163) establishes expectations for school performance and requires turnaround intervention for those schools that demonstrate persistent low-performance over time. The Colorado State Board of Education is preparing to establish rules to administer the new accountability system. A public hearing on those rules is scheduled for the March 2010 board meeting.

With Mass Insight's coordination, said Commissioner Jones, states involved in the partnership will share what strategies are or are not working. "As a group of states, we are doing this in an open-source manner, working together," he said. "Ultimately, we have to figure out a better way to turnaround low-performing schools, particularly in terms of sustaining progress and dramatically improving results."

Commissioner Jones said schools and districts will decide whether to be included in Mass Insight's Partnership Zone work.

About Partnership Zones

In its 2007 report, "The Turnaround Challenge," Mass Insight found that a small but growing number of high-performing, high-poverty

schools are demonstrating that the presence of key design elements can bring highly challenged student populations to high achievement.

“Lessons from these schools,” the report states, “indicate a need for the following elements in any school turnaround effort—all of which reflect characteristics that are not norms, broadly speaking, of traditional inside-the-system public schooling:

- Clearly defined authority to act based on what’s best for children and learning—i.e., flexibility and control over staffing, scheduling, budget and curriculum.
- Relentless focus on hiring and staff development as part of an overall “people strategy” to ensure the best possible teaching force.
- Highly capable, distributed school leadership—i.e., not simply the principal, but an effective leadership team.
- Additional time in the school day and across the school year.
- Performance-based behavioral expectations for all stakeholders including teachers, students and (often) parents.
- Integrated, research-based programs and related social services that are specifically designed, personalized and adjusted to address students’ academic and related psycho-social needs.

To read the complete report, follow this link:

http://www.massinsight.org/resourcefiles/TheTurnaroundChallenge_2007.pdf

According to Mass Insight, states in the new collaboration will initially establish Partnership Zones in one or two school districts that will serve as “proof points” to demonstrate the success of a more strategic approach to turning around low-performing schools. Each cluster of three to five low-performing schools will be supported by a Lead Partner—an organization that provides academic and students support services to schools as well as coordinates and focuses the turnaround effort.

The design, timing and implementation of each Partnership Zone will vary depending on each state’s plan, but all zones will draw on the same set of guiding principles required of the Mass Insight turnaround approach.

The six states were selected by Mass Insight according to their:

- Commitment to the Partnership Zone framework as outlined in “The Turnaround Challenge.”

- Commitment to investing the resources necessary for successful turnaround.
- The alignment and support of state leadership.

About The School Turnaround Group

The School Turnaround Group is a division of Mass Insight Education & Research Institute. Mass Insight, founded in 1997, is an independent non-profit that organizes public schools, higher education, business and state government to significantly improve student performance, with a focus on closing achievement gaps.

Mass Insight's education reform strategies are defined by two convictions: that change at scale depends on the practical integration of research, policy and practice; and that only dramatic and comprehensive change in high-poverty schools will produce significant gains. More information: www.massinsight.org/turnaround.

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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