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April 12, 2010

News Release

Finishing the Race to the Top

(Note: The following column was published in today's edition of The Denver Post.)

By Dwight D. Jones, Colorado Commissioner of Education

In the wake of the announcement that Delaware and Tennessee were the sole recipients in the initial Race to the Top competition, there's been much ado about Colorado's faring in round one.

Colorado's Race to the Top application featured the very reform plan we began implementing with bipartisan support from the governor, state legislature, state board of education and district leaders statewide. Colorado's reform plan is a strong one. Scoring irregularities aside, our reviewers generally agreed on this point. As one reviewer noted, "The activities presented in the application ... are ... related to ongoing programs started well before [Race to the Top] ... focus[ed] on increased student achievement, decreasing achievement gaps ... and increasing the rates at which students graduate from high school prepared for college and careers. "

This second round of Race to the Top is not about Delaware and Tennessee, or even about how Colorado compares. It is a new competition among the remaining states that are prepared to adopt bold, innovative reform measures that are at least as ambitious as those they are willing to implement in order to dramatically increase student achievement. Sen. Mike Johnston's soon-to-be-introduced "Educator Evaluations & Effectiveness" bill is an example of one such measure. Critics in fact chide Colorado, speculating that had the Tennessee-like bill already been introduced, Colorado would have had a fighting chance.

I believe passing a new state law addressing teacher effectiveness might boost our chances in the second round. However, Sen. Johnston's bill is not just about Race to the Top, but *teacher tenure* and *due process*, as well as *forced placement*—issues which are not new to the state and which need to be discussed. Now is a good time to do so, Race or no Race. Our continued avoidance of this discussion will continue to get us nowhere.

Case in point: With 55,000 tenured teachers, the New York City Department of Education dismissed only three teachers for incompetence in a two-year period (*The New York Times*, Feb. 23, 2010). That's a mere .00005 percent of the workforce; few believe the other 99.99995 percent of teachers are doing a stellar job. The numbers in other cities and states, including here in Colorado, also suggest that the system—the people running the schools and districts, and the tools at their disposal—are not yet up to the task. Too many teachers who don't make the grade in one school are passed along (or *forced-placed*) to the next.

Also not new, though unpopular with some, is the idea of tying at least 50 percent of a teacher's evaluation to his or her students' achievement—an expressed directive of the governor's January executive order commissioning his Council for Educator Effectiveness. Sen. Johnston's bill codifies this directive, further emphasizing the need for a fair and accurate evaluation system.

Personally, I believe we have let teachers down by not adequately and consistently providing them evaluations. As professionals, their performance on the job should be evaluated using multiple measures, just as professionals in other industry and business sectors are evaluated. They deserve to know how well they are doing their jobs and what they could do better. We are fortunate in Colorado to have a teaching corps willing to step up and be held accountable. Few other states can boast of similar leadership from their teachers' unions.

What will be made clear in Colorado's revised submission are the efforts both planned and underway to provide teachers the support, training and development they need to be effective educators. Sen. Johnston's bill pulls together the requisite pieces to establish an educator effectiveness system. And regardless of whether a new teacher effectiveness law might improve our chances in round two, Colorado needs better teacher evaluation systems. Period.

And so the Race to the Top continues, though the size of the prize has diminished. In round two, Colorado may apply for a maximum of \$175 million, which is \$202 million less than requested in round one. That said, however, we can do a lot with \$175 million, and we can do so with fidelity.

With round two come new reviewers with new ideas about what constitutes a winning application. We have no guarantee of success. We are, however, confident of one thing: Colorado's reform plan is a strong plan. It's a smart plan. And it's the right plan for Colorado's students.

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