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## **News Release**

### ***State Board Of Education, Commissioner Jones Laud Award-Winning Principals And Students***

The State Board of Education and Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones this week took time to recognize outstanding educators and students from across the state.

The state board recognized Mary Kay Sommers, the Poudre School District principal who was named 2010 Colorado National Distinguished Elementary School Principal of the Year; Mark Strakbein, the Eagle County Schools principal who was named High School Principal of the Year; and Lori Smith, the Cheyenne Mountain School District principal who was named Middle School Principal of the Year.

Sommers is principal at Shepardson Elementary School; Strakbein is principal of Eagle Valley High School and Smith is principal of Cheyenne Mountain Junior High. The Colorado Association of School Executives coordinated the selection process and announced the selection of the three principals in early April.

State board chairman Bob Schaffer said he has known Sommers for many years and lauded her “longstanding commitment to education” and “inspiration” to fellow educators.

“This is a community of hyper-engaged parents,” said Schaffer. “When you walk into Shepardson, the place is crawling with parents. It’s pretty remarkable.”

Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones noted the jump in graduation rate at Eagle Valley High School. The graduation rate at

Eagle Valley High stood at 92.5 percent in 2009—an increase of over 22 percentage points in the past five years and far above the state average. Commissioner Jones also noted the “positive school culture” instilled by Strakbein and the reforms he has initiated including a comprehensive teacher evaluation system, curriculum alignment and strong mentoring programs.

“We challenge our staff,” Strakbein told the board. “We educate every student for success...that is our focus, every single student.”

At Cheyenne Mountain Junior High, Commissioner Jones noted, Smith has brought a “student-centered vision of education” that relies on “shared responsibility for success of Cheyenne Mountain students.” Jones said he is very familiar with her “outstanding” school.

Smith said she was “humbled” by the award and that while most success is measured by data, she also focuses on the human aspect of being a school leader. “My biggest success this year involved a personal relationship with a struggling student,” said Smith. “There is nowhere I would rather be.”

### **Presidential Scholars**

The board also recognized four Colorado students who have been named Presidential Scholars. Up to 141 students are identified as Presidential Scholars across the country, recognizing the nation’s most distinguished graduating high school seniors.

This year’s Colorado recipients are Preston So (Air Academy High School); Erica Vlahinos (Douglas County High School); Kevin Wittenberg (Niwot High School) and Wendy Zeng (Lakewood Senior High School). All but So attended this week’s board meeting in person.

Erica told the board she’s headed to the Cincinnati Conservatory of Music to study musical theater. Kevin will be attending Harvard University with an eye on a future as a biomedical engineer. Wendy said she would be studying math and science at Cornell University.

“The truly great teachers are the ones that inspire you...that can instill the same passion they have in their subject into you,” Kevin Wittenberg told the board.

### **Valdez Elementary School – Innovation Status Granted**

The state board approved unanimously Denver Public Schools’ Valdez Elementary School as a designated School of Innovation, making it the

fifth school in the state to gain status under the 2008 state law. The Innovation Schools Act provides considerable flexibility to how an individual school may be managed. Each applicant school is required to show support from the school community, including teachers, and have its plan approved by its local school board as well as the state board.

Valdez, an ECE-5 school, currently offers a dual-language (English and Spanish) program in pre-school through second grade and plans to expand the dual-language program to all grades by 2013.

Valdez's plans for innovation include a wide range of waivers. Principal Peter Sherman told the board the school is primarily interested in using waivers related to scheduling, hiring, teacher evaluations, incentives and budgeting.

There are now five Schools of Innovation in Colorado, and they are all in Denver. The others are Manual High School, Montclair School of Academics and Enrichment, Cole Arts and Sciences Academy and the Denver Green School.

### **Other Action**

In other action, the state board of education:

- Held a public rulemaking hearing on the amendments to the rules for the Administration of Education Reform and approved a motion in support of the amendments.
- Held a public rulemaking hearing for the rules for the administration of the Concurrent Enrollment Program and approved a motion approving the rules.
- Held a public rulemaking hearing on the rules for the administration of Accountability for Alternative Campuses and approved a motion approving the rules.
- Held a public rulemaking hearing on the rules for the Administration, Certification and Oversight of Online Programs and approved approving the rules.
- Adopted the rules governing the Renewable Energy and Energy Efficiency for Schools Loan Program.

- Adopted rules amending the educator licensing rules concerning Alternative Licensing and Teacher of the Year.
- Reappointed a facilities planner/manager and appointment of a school board member to the Public School Capital Construction Assistance Board.
- Approved funds for in-district high-cost programs and funds for out-of-district high-cost programs.
- Approved an extension of a portion of the contingency reserve loan for Costilla-Centennial School District R-1.
- Took action on disciplinary proceedings concerning License Charge No. 2010EC08.
- Took action on disciplinary proceedings concerning an application for License Charge No. 2010EC10.
- Laid over action to the next meeting on disciplinary proceedings concerning License Charge No. 2010EC11.
- Took action on disciplinary proceedings concerning Authorization Charge No. 2010EC13.
- Took action on disciplinary proceedings concerning License Charge No. 2010EC15.
- Took action on disciplinary proceedings concerning Authorization Charge No. 2010EC16.
- Approved renewal emergency authorization (monthly total of 1).
- Approved initial emergency authorizations (monthly total 3).
- Approved a five-year reauthorization of the Teacher Preparation Program at the University of Colorado at Colorado Springs and approved a five-year re-authorization of the Teacher Preparation Program at the University of Colorado at Boulder. These motions came with new language, introduced by State Board Member Elaine Gantz Berman and seconded by State Board Member Peggy Littleton. The new language, approved on a 5-2 vote, also requires that "by June, 2012, the educator preparation program will submit to the State Board of Education evidence of how it

has met the expectations of legislation pertaining to educator effectiveness, including S.B. 10-036 and S.B. 10-191; implementation of statewide educator ID numbers; revised academic content standards; and also to submit recommendations from the program regarding how to align the standards and criteria for accreditation with the impact of program graduates upon the achievement of their students.”

Berman said the intent of the language was a message that teacher preparation programs need to show they are making adjustments in their training programs to address the new legislative and policy landscape around improving teacher effectiveness.

State board vice-chairman Randy DeHoff said the language tells higher education institutions that they can’t wait five years (the period of their reauthorization) to make changes. “We aren’t asking a lot of the institutions of higher education that they shouldn’t be doing otherwise,” said DeHoff.

Board members Marcia Neal and Angelika Schroeder voted against the new language but voted for the five-year reauthorizations of both teacher preparation programs.

- Approved the Teacher Preparation Program for Gifted and Talented Endorsement from University of Colorado at Colorado Springs.
- Approved a waiver request by Colorado Springs School District 11 on behalf of GLOBE Charter School.
- Approved a waiver request by Littleton Public Schools on behalf of Littleton Preparatory Charter School.

**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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