



December 6, 2016

Dear Rural Superintendents,

I hope you enjoyed your Thanksgiving holiday and were able to spend time with family and friends. As I recently attended the rural superintendents council, I wanted to send an update and follow up on our work to support rural districts. First and foremost, we continue to be committed to the rural relief efforts we have been working on during the past several months. Providing relief and support to our rural school districts is an ongoing priority for us. I sent a similar update several months ago - so for some I apologize for the repeat - but we've heard from others that they might not have seen this.

From February to April, CDE staff worked with the Rural Schools Alliance, Rural Education Council and others to think about ways we could support the unique needs of rural districts. CDE staff, based on our work with you and your staff, submitted ideas to lessen reporting burdens and increase support for rural districts across the state. These ideas were reviewed by several rural superintendents as well as the CDE Field Service Team to identify priority areas for supporting rural districts. We vetted these ideas with a variety of partners, including CASE and the Rural Schools Alliance. We also presented them at the Rural Education Council to find out if we were on the right track and what ideas we might have missed. We got a lot of good feedback and learned a few lessons:

1. There is no "one size fits all" solution; this is as true for differences among rural districts as it is for differences between rural and urban districts.
2. It is important that CDE provide flexibility so rural districts are able to select those areas of relief most relevant to their own needs, planning calendars and activities.
3. A serious challenge for one district may not be an issue at all for another, so CDE rural relief efforts should consider many different contexts.

Here's what has recently been done or is currently underway:

Reduce data entry burden

We now have the ability to pre-populate reports, thereby eliminating the need to key in every data element for each data collection. We are once again pre-populating the Civil Rights Data Collection (CRDC) with approved data to assist LEAs in that federal submission. We've been doing this for a couple of years, and will keep doing so as long as the districts receive value out of it and request it. For CRDS, we can also pre-populate about 60 percent of the data for those districts that have submitted Teacher Student Data Link (TSDL) data. For information on pre-populating data reports, please contact Marcia Bohannon at Bohannon_M@cde.state.co.us or 303-866-6175.

We have completed our audit of data collections (done by an independent vendor) and the results showed that we are not collecting any data that is not required by law. We know that doesn't help with the burden of submissions, but at least we can assure you that we aren't collecting data that we absolutely don't have to collect. We will continue to closely monitor data collections using the Education Data



Advisory Committee and the awareness and prioritization of this important rural relief effort. For information on the data audit, please contact Jill Stacey at Stacey_j@cde.state.co.us or 303-866-6395.

Streamline Improvement Planning and Evaluation Processes

Unified Improvement Planning

- We have implemented an online system for completing the Unified Improvement Plan (UIP) that allows for greater flexibility in structure and format of the UIP.
- We are gathering information from the field to help us increase flexibility and identify other ways to further streamline the UIP process.
- For further information or to give feedback on Unified Improvement Planning, please contact Lisa Medler at Medler_L@cde.state.co.us or 303-866-6993.

Educator Effectiveness

We connected with several of you to talk about the need for flexibility in this process and are now working on a revised rubric. For more information on this, please contact Dawn Pare at Pare_D@cde.state.co.us or 303-866-5926.

Other efforts to streamline educator effectiveness processes include the following:

- In October the educator effectiveness team released a “check all” feature in Randa. This feature is helpful when completing evaluations by allowing the evaluator to select the rating and it will automatically backfill the rest of the elements. The evaluator then can go back and remove any check marks that were not met. This is a time-saving strategy that many of our districts have requested.
- Also this fall, the educator effectiveness unit launched the comprehensive review of the state model educator effectiveness rubric. That review continues through the remainder of the school year and an updated rubric consisting of fewer professional practices will be released for pilot in the next school year. This rubric will help differentiate for the needs of educators.

Build capacity around teacher recruitment

We will continue to support rural district’s efforts to recruit and retain teachers by facilitating conversations between districts and higher education institutions. Representatives from colleges and universities have attended Rural Education Council meetings to obtain critical input and feedback on teacher retention and recruitment within their individual programs. We will continue to initiate dialogue with Colorado’s higher education institutions with the goal of expanding efforts to recruit and retain great teachers across the state of Colorado.

Request to Reconsider Process

Based on some of your feedback we worked to create templates and easier processes for the Request to Reconsider Process. We know we still have work to do to streamline this process in the future, but I think we were able to improve the process and time it took for many this year.

The entire Field Services Team are now members of the Cabinet

Our field services team comprised of Jhon Penn, John Condie and Tina Goar are all now regular members of the CDE Cabinet. Jhon has been a member of cabinet, but adding the whole team provides additional opportunities on a regular basis for dialogue, input and feedback on the needs of rural districts.

Rural Education Council



The Rural Education Council continues to be a helpful and valuable rural voice for the commissioner and department with our work in a number of important areas including educator licensing, graduation guidelines, rural educator recruitment and retention, accountability, performance frameworks, dialogue with higher education. Recently the council has facilitated the beginning of an ongoing dialogue with career and technical education leaders. During the next council meeting council members will be learning more about and providing feedback on the rulemaking process at CDE.

Rulemaking Process

We heard at the recent Rural Council meeting, that rules promulgated by the State Board of Education can still be cumbersome to rural districts. We are working with the field services team to determine more feedback loops in the rulemaking process to ensure the rural voice is heard. For example, Tina Goar will email Rural Ed Council members information about rulemaking currently in progress to enable additional rural input and feedback. We also are considering a “checklist” that CDE staff will use to ensure that rural perspectives are thought about in the development process. This may be a future topic of one of the Rural Council meetings.

Exploring for future action:

- Based on requests from several superintendents, we are looking into the feasibility of implementing an optional statewide student information system and a shared Learning Management System (LMS). An LMS system would provide a shared software application for e-learning, allowing for a consistent online platform for training programs provided by CDE. If the ideas prove promising, legislation may be pursued for necessary resources and funding. This would be a very long-term goal and would need legislative resources.
- We will continue reviewing all proposed data collections to ensure they are not redundant and are indeed required by statute via the Education Data Advisory Committee.
- Expand the teacher pipeline
 - To attract and retain more teachers in rural areas, we will continue to expand work with in-state educator preparation programs, including alternative licensure programs to explore new programs and supports for rural Colorado.
 - Consider working with multiple groups to determine a bigger statewide plan to address the teacher shortage. We are already working to put information together on the teacher shortage to try and get attention on this issue at the legislative level.

Our overarching goal at CDE is to provide the information and support you need to serve your students. We want to hear your thoughts and ideas on what you need - be it connections to other districts, ideas about how to implement innovative systems to enhance student achievement, or someone sit down with you to work through new ideas, rules or processes. We want to be your partner in helping you reach your goals for Colorado schools and students.

Tina and I thank you for your continued hard work and commitment to the children of Colorado.

Sincerely,



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Interim Commissioner

