

Colorado's Race to the Top and the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act (ARRA): Standards and Assessments

Section I: Overview

On Feb. 17, 2009 President Obama enacted the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009. This legislation was primarily designed to stimulate the economy through federal investments in critical state services such as transportation, health care, renewable energy, critical government services, and education. These funds were and remain critically important to the provision of government services. However, it is important to keep in mind that the Recovery Act is as much about reform and renewal as it is about providing a financial safety net.

The Recovery Act contains a variety of reform oriented initiatives. The education reforms are expressed in the form of four state-level assurances:¹

- To improve the collection and use of data through longitudinal data systems;
- To enhance the quality of standards and assessments;
- To provide support for chronically low performing schools; and
- To achieve equity in the distribution of highly effective teachers and leaders.

Though every state in the nation is required to pursue the above-mentioned assurances as a condition of receiving State Fiscal Stabilization Funds (the primary source of education funds in the Recovery Act), an additional \$4.35 billion was earmarked by Congress for the purpose of establishing an unprecedented national competition among states that show promise in successfully implementing the Recovery Act's assurances. This competition has been called Race to the Top.

On July 24, 2009, the U.S. Department of Education issued notice of proposed priorities, requirements, and selection criteria for the Race to the Top and solicited public comment to those. In October 2009, the U.S. Department of Education will issue the official Race to the Top Request for Proposals. In the first of a two-phase sequence, all eligible and interested states will submit proposals to the U.S. Department of Education. These will be due by the end of 2009. Phase I awards will be announced in March 2010. States may also apply in Phase II which opens in mid-late spring 2010. A copy of the

priorities, requirements, and selection criteria, including information on how to submit comments is available online at <http://www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/index.html>.

Colorado will submit a proposal for the Race to the Top competition in Phase I.

In the coming months, the Ritter Administration, by way of Lt. Governor O'Brien's office, will join the Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Department of Higher Education to facilitate a series of statewide conversations regarding the Colorado Race to the Top proposal. This process will culminate in the delivery of recommendations to Governor Ritter who – in conjunction with the State Commissioner of Education Dwight Jones and the State Board of Education – will prepare and submit the Colorado application for Race to the Top funding.

This paper provides a common starting point for conversations that will take place regarding the preparation of Colorado's Race to the Top proposal. In other words, it represents a point of departure for the impending statewide discussions and not the conclusion of a previously determined outcome.

This paper provides background and explains progress Colorado has made in this area and the challenges and opportunities that lie ahead. It will also illustrate that Colorado's reform agenda closely matches the agenda that is outlined in the Recovery Act for the country at large. Finally, it is intended to help participants in the Race to the Top effort in Colorado consider how Race to the Top funds could help accelerate the state's progress toward realizing the goals for improved student achievement that are embedded in the standards and assessments assurance.

*American Recovery and Reinvestment Act Assurance: Improving State Content Standards and Assessments*²

- A. Enhance the quality of academic assessments it administers pursuant to section 1111(b)(3) of Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA).³ This shall be accomplished through activities such as those described in section 6112(a) of such Act;⁴
- B. Comply with requirements of paragraphs (3)(C)(ix) and (6) of section 1111(b) of ESEA. And comply with section 612(a)(16) of the Individuals with Disabilities in Education Act (IDEA) related to the inclusion of children with disabilities and limited English proficient students in State assessments, the

development of valid and reliable assessments for those students, and the provision of accommodations that enable their participation in State assessments;⁵

- C. Take steps to improve State academic content standards and student academic achievement standards consistent with section 6401(e)(1)(A)(ii) of the America COMPETES Act

Proposed Priorities, Requirements and Selection Criteria for the Race to the Top Proposal

The proposed guidelines published on July 24, 2009 state that, with respect to each assurance, the State will need to demonstrate compliance with certain “State Reform Conditions Criteria” (evidence of progress made to date) as well as include certain “Reform Plan Criteria” (the components of the reform efforts proposed to be implemented as a result of a grant award). Following is a summary of those criteria. It is important to remember that components of the criteria, as well as their structure, may change substantially before the final proposal is published.

State Reform Conditions Criteria refer to the extent to which a State has demonstrated commitment to improving the quality of its standards by:

- Joining a consortium of states to jointly develop and adopt by June 2010 a common set of internationally benchmarked K-12 standards that build toward college- and career-ready readiness by the time of high school graduation (developing and adopting common standards criteria); and
- Joining a consortium of states to jointly develop and implement high-quality standardized assessments aligned with the consortium's common set of standards (developing and implementing standardized assessments aligned to common standards).

Reform Plan Criteria are used to gauge the extent to which a State has a high-quality plan and ambitious but achievable annual targets to accomplish each of the following:

- In collaboration with its participating Local Educational Agencies (LEAs), statewide implementation of internationally benchmarked K-12 standards that build toward college- and career-readiness by the time of high school graduation; and
- Develop high-quality assessments tied to those standards.

Section II: Background and the National Perspective ⁶

The United States is an economic leader in part because of its leadership in education during the 20th century. Now other countries are working hard to expand and improve education, and we've lost our leading edge. Four decades ago, the U.S. had the best high school graduation rate in the world, but now it ranks 18th out of 24 industrialized countries. As recently as 1995, the United States was still tied for first in the proportion of young adults with a college degree, but by 2000 it had slipped to 9th and by 2006 to 14th – below the average of the industrialized world.

Content standards are the foundation of a state's education system, articulating the knowledge and skills that students should acquire at every grade level; however, a number of questions persist regarding the quality, variability, and cost of state standards.

Standards in top-achieving countries are focused, rigorous, and coherent. State standards in the U.S. generally are not. Though it is important to articulate the goals for student performance, the act of standards-setting alone is not sufficient to ensure students master them. Assessments indicate what students know and how well they know it. Teachers are ultimately responsible for translating and organizing the standards into instruction or courses. Accountability can help set system-wide targets and solutions.

Education is a tremendously important lever for ensuring competitiveness and prosperity in the age of globalization. ⁷ Recent economic studies show that high skills lead to better wages, more equitable distributions of income, and substantial gains in economic productivity. Higher math performance at the end of high school translates into a 12 percent increase in future earnings. If the United States raised students' math and science skills to globally competitive levels over the next two decades, its GDP would be an additional 36 percent higher 75 years from now. ⁸

Many experts have concluded that since the United States can no longer compete in quantity of human capital, it will have to compete in quality by providing its young people with the highest level of math, science, reading, and problem-solving skills in the world. But so far, the United States has not responded to this skills challenge. Out of 30 industrialized countries participating in the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development's Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA) in 2006, the

United States ranked 25th in math and 21st in science. The United States' global position is slipping not because its schools are getting worse. Rather, the United States is losing ground because its education outcomes have mostly stagnated while those in other countries have surged.⁹

Research has revealed striking similarities among the math and science standards in top-performing nations, along with stark differences between world-class expectations and standards in most U.S. states.¹⁰ Standards in the best-performing nations share three characteristics not commonly found in U.S. standards: focus, rigor, and coherence.

In recognition of the need to raise standards in the U.S., a majority of states are participating in the common core state standards initiative led by the National Governors Association Center for Best Practices and the Council of Chief State School Officers, in partnership with Achieve, Inc, ACT, and the College Board. This is a state-led process that will draw on evidence and lead to the development and adoption of a common core of state standards in English language arts and mathematics for grades K-12. These standards will be aligned with college and work expectations, include rigorous content and skills, and be internationally benchmarked. The intent is that these standards will be aligned to state assessments and classroom practices. The second phase of this initiative will be the development of common assessments aligned to the core standards developed through this process.

Content standards are the foundation of a state's education system, articulating the knowledge and skills that students should acquire at each grade level. Superintendents, principals, and teachers develop curricula and make program decisions based on those standards. Assessments intend to measure how well students have achieved these standards. Accountability systems report student outcomes, allowing policymakers to evaluate and respond to the effectiveness of their education investments.

State assessments help policymakers determine whether their education investments result in academic gains. Many states now work with test publishers to develop customized tests that align with their state content standards. States pay a high price for these assessments; customized tests can be five times more expensive than off-the-shelf tests.¹¹ Despite customization of tests and external reviews, half of the state tests administered each year do not align with state academic standards.¹² In part, this is because most state standards include too many topics to be taught in a school year, much less evaluated in a single test.

As states establish world-class standards and adopt other policies based on international best practices, leaders will want information on whether students are benefiting from the changes and are meeting higher expectations. A study of the practices of 10 countries that have developed national standards recommends the administration of national assessments (including open-ended questions) at grades 4, 8, and 12 every two years.¹³

Section III: The Colorado Context: Progress on the Promise

This describes the urgency around successful implementation of postsecondary and workforce ready standards and assessments. It also summarizes recent state progress in this area.

While the present economic downturn is a challenge facing all states, one particular conundrum remains a challenge unique to Colorado: the state successfully imports college-educated talent yet does a poor job of growing its own. The state ranks fourth in the nation with respect to the percentage of adult population that is college educated (35.9 percent). Simultaneously it ranks 46th in terms of high school completion (82.4 percent).¹⁴

A close look at higher education reinforces the point. Colorado is 3rd in the nation with respect to the percent of the state population (age 25-64) with an associate degree or higher (45.7 percent). At the same time, Colorado is 44th in the nation in terms of the percent of native Coloradoans (age 25-64) with an associate degree or higher (33 percent).¹⁵

Even more troubling, Colorado leads the nation in the postsecondary attainment gap between white and Hispanic students (the next largest ethnic group).¹⁶

Under the Governor's leadership, Colorado has pursued an education reform agenda designed to set Colorado up to compete in the global economy. Called the *Colorado Promise*, the agenda aims to: (1) cut in half the high school dropout rate; (2) close achievement gaps; and (3) double the postsecondary certificates and degrees.

To accomplish this, in April 2007 the Governor issued Executive Order B 003 07 establishing a P-20

Education Coordinating Council. This Council established a statewide partnership with key stakeholders. In cooperation with the legislature, the office of the Lt. Governor, the Commissioner of Education, and the Executive Director of Higher Education, this Council helped set in motion policy intended to ensure all students exit high school prepared to compete. It was also in September 2007 that the Colorado Department of Education outlined its intent to undertake a top to bottom revision of standards and assessments.¹⁷

Recently enacted legislation directly addresses Recovery Act assurances and priorities. These include:

- ❑ Senate Bill 08-212 (Preschool to Postsecondary Alignment Act) expands and connects instructional standards and assessments from preschool into college. It calls for the state to (a) define postsecondary and workforce readiness, 21st century skills, and school readiness; (b) revise P-13 standards and assessments so they incorporate 21st century skills, are internationally competitive, and reflect postsecondary and workforce readiness; (c) require all high schools to adopt pathways that lead to postsecondary and workforce readiness and create postsecondary and workforce ready endorsements for high school diplomas; and (d) revise higher education admission requirements as necessary to incorporate the use of newly created standards and assessments that reflect college and workforce readiness. The law called for a top-to-bottom revision of standards in 13 subjects to be completed by December 2009 and the revision of state-administered assessments by December 2010.

- ❑ House Bill 09-1319 (Concurrent Enrollment in Public High Schools Act) repeals all existing concurrent enrollment laws and replaces them with a single, comprehensive law designed to reach both traditional and non-traditional users of concurrent enrollment policies. It calls for the state to (a) modify concurrent enrollment policies to ensure students' postsecondary and workforce readiness, (b) expand postsecondary opportunities to all secondary level K-12 students, (c) permit 12th grade students to address any academic deficiencies through postsecondary remediation prior to leaving high schools, (d) create a statewide "5th year" dual degree option, and (e) create cross-system data sharing practices and public reporting mechanisms for concurrent enrollment programs. It creates the

Accelerating Students Through Concurrent Enrollment program (ASCENT), the nation's first state-level five-year dual degree program, which begins FY 2010-2011.

- ❑ Senate Bill 09-285 (Career and Technical Education in Concurrent Enrollment Act) complements House Bill 09-1319 by specifically authorizing the inclusion of Career and Technical Education (CTE) course and programs in the state's concurrent enrollment law.

Significant strides have been made with respect to implementation of these bills. In December 2008 the State Board of Education formally adopted a description for "School Readiness." As called for under Senate Bill 08-212 the State Board and the Colorado Commissioner on Higher Education adopted on June 30, 2009 a description of "Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness." The state has nearly completed revision of the content standards for 13 subjects—math, science, reading/writing, history, geography, civics, economics, financial literacy, art, music, dance/theatre, physical education/health, and world languages. In conducting this work, Colorado has collaborated with national thought leaders including Stanley Rabinowitz (WestEd and The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation), Roger Sampson (Education Commission of the States), Tim Shanahan (University of Illinois), Eva Baker (National Center for Research on Standards and Student Testing), as well as representatives from the National Center for the Improvement of Educational Assessment. The intent has been to set our sights not just on the best in the U.S. but to benchmark against the best worldwide. To benchmark this work, Colorado turned to states (Massachusetts and Virginia) and countries (Singapore and Finland) that performed highly on international assessment (Third International Math and Science Study). In December 2009 the State Board of Education is expected to act on recommendations to adopt these revisions. The revision process has involved business, the public, representatives from 2- and 4-year institutions, and P-12 Colorado educators from all regions of the state. The objective has been to update expectations with respect to what students should know and be able to do. The state standards are being reshaped so they are internationally competitive, better reflect 21st century skills, and are intended to ready all students for post-secondary education or the Colorado workforce.

Recently, Colorado joined 46 other U.S. states and three territories in agreeing to participate in a national effort intended to develop a common core of content standards in two subjects: English and language arts; and mathematics.¹⁸ Colorado is keenly interested in helping to inform the conversation around a common core of state standards and to contribute in a way that is helpful, as the process has

the potential to deliver on Governor Ritter's expressed interest in designing tools to reliably benchmark Colorado's standards and more meaningfully evaluate student achievement across states and nations. While signaling its willingness and desire to contribute to a conversation on a common set of standards, Governor Ritter and Commissioner Jones have been clear in pointing out that the common core process will not disrupt the momentum that has been built around the sound work on revising standards that has recently been accomplished in Colorado.

Colorado is in a position to evaluate the adequacy of the proposed common core standards largely because the effort in Colorado to revise reading and writing standards occurred in advance of the more-recent work on the common core standards. The work that has gone into revising the state content standards has created "buy-in", understanding, and support within Colorado for its own upgraded standards. These recent revisions to state standards provide a healthy basis for comparison and contrast and make it easy for Colorado to comment on the adequacy of the proposed common core standards. It is possibly because of this that Colorado was selected as one of six states invited to critique early drafts of the proposed common core standards. The other states were Massachusetts, Florida, Minnesota, California, and Georgia.

At this early stage Colorado has simply agreed to contribute its point of view to a process. While the process to develop the common core standards is still unfolding, the pleasant surprise is the high degree of alignment between the proposed common core standards and the revised standards in Colorado, especially in the area of English and language arts (i.e., reading and writing). In the area of math, the alignment between proposed revisions to Colorado math standards and the proposed common core standards is not as tight as in English and language arts. Despite this, the preponderance of evidence suggests a close correspondence between concepts and skills in the proposed math standards in Colorado and the common core standards in math. And it is becoming evident that some of the ideas that are embedded in the common core math standards can help inform and improve the work that Colorado has already done in this subject.

In light of Colorado's recent work on its own standards it is easy to understand why the Colorado standards differ from the nascent common core standards. For one, Colorado is further down the road of standards revision. This explains why Colorado has not only identified the competencies needed for every prepared graduate but the state has also identified year-to-year expectations. As a result,

Colorado is well-positioned to inform and affect the course of this conversation taking place among the states. Following are a few observations Colorado has offered of the draft common core standards.

1. While the common core draft standards criteria states "The goal of these standards is aspirational", the current revised Colorado standards are being written with the goal in mind that all students will master the knowledge and skills represented by the standards. In other words, under the common core it is hoped that all students exiting high school can demonstrate that they have grasped the knowledge and skills represented by the common core standards. By contrast, in Colorado it is expected that all Colorado students will demonstrate a command of the knowledge and skill embedded in the Colorado content standards by the time they exit high school. While this could potentially affect the alignment between the common core draft and the draft Colorado standards, early indications are that Colorado's expectations appear at least to be on a par with those of the common core (and in some respects go beyond the common core). Colorado stands to benefit from the work being done on the common core. It is easy to imagine Colorado finding a way to use some of the principles outlined in the common core to enhance the work already done in Colorado. At the same time, the state will be cautious about committing to a project like a state-led common core standards initiative if it means a retreat from a commitment to "fewer, clearer, higher" and "expectations for all students." In some respects, this difference illustrates that Colorado is in the process of moving beyond the notion of "No Child Left Behind" and is now guided a bright line principle of its own creation. "Every Student a Prepared Graduate – Proficient by Exit." This principle guides the work now unfolding in Colorado. It begins with standards. It will translate into how assessments are designed. And via the Colorado Growth Model it is the way that student performance is now being measured and reported.
2. In certain respects Colorado's effort to revise standards exceeds the effort involved in the common core. For instance, in the work involving the development of the common core standards no effort is being made to include early childhood standards. Nor is there any definition of school readiness within the common core. This raises a question about how standards can be created without two "bookends" that provide a frame for the work. The "bookends" are school readiness on one hand and postsecondary/workforce readiness on

the other. In its own work on revising standards, Colorado has defined “school readiness” and has developed standards from preschool through 12th grade.

3. The newly-revised and proposed standards in Colorado for reading/writing and for math differ from the proposed common core standards in another important respect. This difference has to do with performance standards. "Performance standards" provide a way to tell whether students are proficient. They answer the "how good is good enough" question. In fairness, the common core standards do provide a few examples of the kinds of passages and texts that students would have to analyze. Yet, just a few of these are offered. By contrast, the newly revised and draft Colorado standards for reading and writing tie content standards to performance standards in a much more systematic fashion. Because Colorado's version includes evidence outcomes that spell out what students should be able to know and do, Colorado's standards are more fine-grained and more actionable than the common core. It would enhance the common core standards if they more-systematically specified what students would have to do in order to be judged proficient. This will help ensure that assessments that follow are pitched to the proper level of accomplishment. It is important to specify what students should know and be able to do but it is equally important to specify how well they need to be able to perform.

4. As work on the proposed common core standards moves forward, it will be useful to see how it is determined how well a state's standards are aligned with the common core. States have been informed that in order to qualify for Race to the Top funds they must demonstrate 85 percent agreement with the common core. It is not yet clear how this 85 percent alignment will be determined. For instance, states could be expected to adopt the common core standards outright and then could be free to exceed the common core by adding other standards of their choice. Other approaches could be taken to decide if a state has 85 percent alignment. For example, an objective and expert outside entity could compare a state's standards to the content in common core standards and see how well the two correspond. Taking this approach would show, for instance, that Colorado's revised standards for reading and writing align closely with the proposed common core standards for English and language arts and thus would likely exceed a criteria calling for 85 percent agreement. In math, the correspondence is slightly less and may be due in part to the fact that the proposed common core math standards emphasize

some concepts that do not typically appear prominently in the literature. Nevertheless, the correspondence between the Colorado revised math standards and the common core math standards is still substantial. The way in which an 85 percent agreement is determined is non-trivial. Handled thoughtfully, it could bring added value both to the common core and Colorado's revised standards. Because of all the hard work and good will that Coloradoans have invested in revising the standards, this is worthy of attention. That is not to say that Colorado is unwilling to eventually or somehow endorse the common core. Instead it suggests that the details matter.

5. At this early stage it is not yet certain whether draft common core standards will be turned into grade-by-grade standards or instead into standards that span a range of grades. Colorado has spelled out standards on a grade-by-grade fashion. Grade-by-grade standards permit grade-by-grade assessment which then makes longitudinal growth possible. Measures of longitudinal growth provide better feedback on system performance (potentially at the level of student, classroom, school, district, and state). Longitudinal growth is a more-useful way to help the system learn how to get better faster.

Colorado's previous experience with standards and assessments informs the current effort. While in 1993 Colorado was in the vanguard of the standards reform effort nationally, the state's experience with standards and assessments has been one of both highs and lows. Important lessons were learned in the first wave of the standards reform effort in Colorado. To achieve the goal of preparing all students for postsecondary and workforce readiness and for success in a global economy, Colorado understands it is vital to expect more of ourselves as adults as well as of our students. The key is a system that is aligned end to end, from preschool through college and career, one that prepares young people for the next century not the last one. Central to this work is the notion that internationally competitive standards tend to be "fewer, clearer, and higher" than those that have typically been seen in the United States.

Looking ahead, Colorado envisions a next generation system of assessment that is much different from the current one. It may include online testing that provides students with multiple opportunities within a given year to take the assessment. It may involve assessments that are scored in real time so teachers have the results much more quickly. It is likely to include summative assessment (administered at the end of a learning sequence) as well as intermediate or interim assessments that are intended to be used

formatively. The results of these intermediate assessments give teachers and parents much more useful information on how a student is progressing. It is certain to include forms of state assessment that are completely new to Colorado (e.g., school readiness and postsecondary readiness assessment). Almost certainly, these assessments will gauge student growth across time.

A preliminary set of desired design features for this next generation system of assessment follows:

1. Fit for purpose which is to (a) gauge student knowledge and skill, (b) inform teaching and learning
2. Includes summative and intermediate or interim assessments used formatively (balanced system)
3. Internationally benchmarked so we can tell if system improves against competition we care about
4. Lends itself to analysis of yearly growth
5. Is relevant to students, staff, and parents (i.e., HS assessments may contribute to college admission)
6. Administered online or electronically
7. Computer adapted (branching occurs so test discriminates for highest- & lowest-performing students)
8. Reduces time needed to complete the test (made possible in part by computer adapted branching)
9. Allows multiple possibilities for the student to take equated forms within the same year
10. Administered at time of the learning but within a particular window (vs at a prescribed time each yr)
11. Gauges mastery
12. Has real-time turnaround of results
13. Includes a mix of item (multiple choice, open-ended constructed response, and online simulations)
14. Incorporates artificial intelligence-aided scoring of open ended test items
15. Meets requirements of federal peer review
16. Accessible to all (so includes English language development and also alternative assessment)
17. Includes provisions for preschool assessment and postsecondary/workforce readiness assessment
18. Gauges student skills and not just content

Revising standards and changing assessments are like the first two acts in a three-act play. They are important in their own right. Yet, their chief purpose is to set the stage for the piece that comes next. To move the needle on the achievement dial, it must all come together in the classroom. For this reason, high quality professional development is critical.

Section IV: Guiding Principles and Related Materials for Race to the Top Subcommittee Participants

Goal for Colorado

To ensure that all students exit high school equipped with the knowledge and 21st century skills needed to succeed in college, career, or the global economy. This will be done by preparing all students for postsecondary/workforce readiness through an aligned system of preschool-to-postsecondary public education that is based on: (1) revised standards that define what all Colorado students should know and be able to do to enter college or the workforce or to compete in a global economy; and (2) assessments that gauge progress, inform teaching, and enhance learning; and (3) support structures that promote competency-based progress, provide alternative pathways to success, make it possible for students to enroll simultaneously in high school and college.

Guiding Questions for Race to the Top Subcommittees

1. How can Race to the Top funds advance this reform vision and accelerate Colorado's efforts to achieve its goal?
2. What data will gauge how we are improving as a system against international competitors we care about most?
3. What are the implications given the belief that competency matters more than "seat time?"
4. How is attention in this arena addressing the unique needs of our youngest learners?

Resources

Attachment I: *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World Class Education*, National Governors' Association, Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve
<http://www.achieve.org/BenchmarkingforSuccess>

Attachment II: *Forward Thinking: Future and Voice of the Colorado Department of Education*, 2007
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/download/PDF/ForwardThinking.pdf>

Attachment III: *Reimagining High School in Colorado: Report of Governor Ritter's Graduation Guidelines Development Council*, Colorado Dept of Education, May 1, 2008, <http://ggdc.pbworks.com>

Attachment IV: *Choice and Innovation: Stimulating Education Reform*, Commissioner Dwight Jones, April 2009
<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdecomm/download/pdf/CHOICE.pdf>

- Attachment V: *Rigor Redefined: Seven Survival Skills for Careers, Colleges, and Citizenship*, Wagner, 2008
Rigor Redefined: Seven Survival Skills for Careers, Colleges, and Citizenship, Wagner, 2008
- Attachment VI: *Economic Impact of the Achievement Gap in America's Schools*, McKinsey and Company, April 2009, <http://www.mckinsey.com/achievementgap>

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Colorado's Race to the Top

<http://www.colorado.gov/cs/Satellite/LeftLtGov/LLG/Page/1240228831801/1187340344163>

Section V: Conclusion

Colorado is in a providential position as it begins the process of assembling its proposal for Race to the Top funds. Assurances spelled out in the Recovery Act are directionally consistent with the state's established reform agendas, in particular Governor Ritter's *Colorado Promise* and The Department of Education's *Forward Thinking* document. More importantly, the state has made noteworthy progress in all of the assurance areas. In other words, the Race to the Top competition provides an unprecedented opportunity for the state to think big while maintaining a clear focus on its existing agenda.

Nonetheless, for Colorado to remain competitive, regardless of whether the state receives Race to the Top funds in the coming year, the communities of the state must collectively embrace the belief that transformational reform is both necessary and possible. To this end, innovation is essential. But innovation is not just change for the sake of change. It must lead to improved processes and results—and, ultimately, dramatic, measurable improvements in student achievement. The courage to move forward and envision a system in which all students realize their own God given potential is our covenant to the future generations of Coloradans.

It's an exciting time. Outcomes of the work taking place in the next five months have the potential to change Colorado's future educational and economic outcomes. Children deserve our best efforts and most innovative thinking, and we welcome all who wish to engage in this process. With the help of the entire Colorado community, we will realize our collective goals while moving boldly into the 21st century.

¹ The American Recovery and Reinvestment Act, Title XIV, Section 14006 (Public Law 111-5) at www.ed.gov/programs/racetothetop/legislation.html

² Section 6401(e)(2)(D) of the America COMPETES Act of 2007 (20 U.S.C. 9871). Public Law 110-69

http://frwebgate.access.gpo.gov/cgi-bin/getdoc.cgi?dbname=110_cong_public_laws&docid=f:publ069.110.pdf

Sec. 6401. Alignment of secondary school graduation requirements with the demands of 21st century postsecondary endeavors and support for P-16 education data systems.

(a) Purpose.—It is the purpose of this section—(1) to promote more accountability with respect to preparation for higher education, the 21st century workforce, and the Armed Forces, by aligning—(A) student knowledge, student

skills, State academic content standards and assessments, and curricula, in Elementary and secondary education, especially with respect to mathematics, science, reading, and, where applicable, engineering and technology; with (B) the demands of higher education, the 21st century workforce, and the Armed Forces; (2) to support the establishment or improvement of statewide P–16 education data systems that—

- (A) assist States in improving the rigor and quality of State academic content standards and assessments;
- (B) ensure students are prepared to succeed in—
 - (i) academic credit-bearing coursework in higher education without the need for remediation;
 - (ii) the 21st century workforce; or
 - (iii) the Armed Forces; and

(3) enable States to have valid and reliable information to inform education policy and practice.

Further, the assurances section from the Nelson-Collins Amendment to the ARRA makes reference to the America COMPETES Act of 2007 and stipulates the following (this was adopted on or about February 10, 2009).

(3) Improving collection and use of data.—The State will establish a longitudinal data system that includes the elements described in section 6401(e)(2)(D) of the America COMPETES Act (20 U.S.C. 9871).

(4) Standards and assessments.—The State—(A) will enhance the quality of academic assessments described in section 1111(b)(3) of ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(3)) through activities such as those described in section 6112(a) of such Act (20 U.S.C. 7301a(a)); (B) will comply with the requirements of paragraphs (3)(C)(ix) and (6) of section 1111(b) of ESEA (20 U.S.C. 6311(b)) and section 612(a)(16) of IDEA (20 U.S.C. 12(a)(16)) related to the inclusion of children with disabilities and limited English proficient students in State assessments, the development of valid and reliable assessments for those students, and the provision of accommodations that enable their participation in State assessments; and (C) will take steps to improve State academic content standards and student academic achievement standards consistent with 6401(e)(1)(A)(ii) of the America COMPETES Act.

³ Ref. 20 U.S.C. 6311(b)(3)

⁴ Ref. 20 U.S.C. 7301a(a)

⁵ Ref. 20 U.S.C. 1412(a)(16)

⁶ Ilene Berman, “Standards and Assessments” from *A Briefing for the National Governors, Perfecting the Formula Effective Strategies = Educational Success*, June 14-15, 2009, James B. Hunt Jr. Institute for Educational Leadership and Policy, Issue Brief I

⁷ National Governors Association, the Council of Chief State School Officers, and Achieve, Inc., *Benchmarking for Success: Ensuring U.S. Students Receive a World-Class Education* (Washington, DC, December 19, 2008).

⁸ Erick Hanushek and Ludger Woessman, “The Role of Cognitive Skills in Economic Development,” *Journal of Economic Literature*, 46, no. 3, (September 2008)

⁹ Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development and the U.S. Department of Education, *Programme for International Student Assessment (PISA)*, Figure I: U.S. 15-Year-Old Performance Compared to Other Countries

¹⁰ William Schmidt, “The Role of Curriculum,” *American Educator* 23, no. 4 (Washington, DC: American Federation of Teachers, Fall 2005)

¹¹ Thomas Toch, *Margins of Error: The Testing Industry in the No Child Left Behind Era*, (Washington, DC: Education Sector, 2006)

¹² American Federation of Teachers, "Smart Testing: Let's Get it Right," *Policy Brief*, (Washington, DC: Author, July 2006)

¹³ William Schmidt, Richard Houang, and Shariff Shakrani, *International Lessons about National Standards* (Washington, DC: Thomas B. Fordham Institute, 2009)

¹⁴ Corporation for Enterprise Development or cfed, ("Percent college-educated" means in 2002, 35.9 percent of Colorado's heads of household had at least a college education) and ("High school completion" means that between 1999 and 2001, 82.4 percent of Colorado's 19-24 year olds had completed high school).

¹⁵ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, "State-by-State Differences in Percentage of Residents Age 25-64 (Born in State) with an Associate's Degree" (2005)

¹⁶ National Center for Higher Education Management Systems, "State-by-State Differences in Postsecondary Degree Attainment Between White Citizens and the Next Largest Ethnic Group (2005)

¹⁷ Commissioner Dwight Jones, *Forward Thinking: The Voice and Future of Colorado*, Colorado Department of Education, September 2007, at www.cde.state.co.us

¹⁸ States that have joined the consortium include: Alabama; Arizona; Arkansas; California; Colorado; Connecticut; Delaware; Florida; Georgia; Hawaii; Idaho; Illinois; Indiana; Iowa; Kansas; Kentucky; Louisiana; Maine; Maryland; Massachusetts; Michigan; Minnesota; Mississippi; Montana; Nebraska; Nevada; New Hampshire; New Jersey; New Mexico; New York; North Carolina; North Dakota; Ohio; Oklahoma; Oregon; Pennsylvania; Rhode Island; South Dakota; Tennessee; Utah; Vermont; Virginia; Washington; West Virginia; Wisconsin; and Wyoming. The territories include District of Columbia, Puerto Rico, and the Virgin Islands. (<http://www.nga.org/portal/site/nga/menuitem>)