

Jared Polis FOUNDATION

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Jared Polis *S p r i n g* 2 0 0 5 Education Report



Dear Coloradans,

I am excited to share with you the Spring 2005 issue of the Jared Polis Education Report. This report contains important information on high school reform, closing the achievement gap among students of different backgrounds, and innovative ideas in education. I welcome you to share any ideas with me at jpolis@jaredpolisfoundation.org, or by mail at P.O. Box 4659, Boulder, CO, 80306. Our children and community benefit when parents, neighbors and educators work together to meet the needs of all Colorado students.

Jared Polis

Jared Polis
Vice-Chairman and Member-At-Large
Colorado State Board of Education

Not Paid for by Tax Dollars

Thanks to: Scott Groginsky, Katie Kimple, Alex Medler, and Sara Radich

Closing the Achievement Gap



To help all students succeed, Colorado leaders are focusing on closing achievement gaps between middle class white students and their minority and low-income counterparts, as measured by Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP) scores, high school graduation and dropout rates, and college attendance. On average, Colorado minority students score proficient or advanced 20-30 percent less often than white students. This gap is greater for students from low-income families.

"Closing the achievement gap is the foundation of education reform in our state," said Bill de la Cruz, co-chairman of the Colorado Closing the Achievement Gap Commission. "This is a crisis that must be addressed by everyone who cares about the success of our children and our community." This commission, made up of representatives from the governor and attorney general's offices, school districts and schools, businesses, and the community, is part of a six-year state reform effort.

The commission recently made recommendations in its report to the state legislature on raising expectations, collecting important data, supporting higher education, improving teacher quality, elevating parent and community involvement, and pursuing best practices, including cultural respect, funding, literacy, more learning time, and early education. Other specific recommendations include:

- ◆ Ensuring strong school leadership;
- ◆ Increasing training for teachers and administrators;
- ◆ Encouraging college participation through a pre-collegiate curriculum;
- ◆ Increasing the number of minority teachers;
- ◆ Increasing the number of good educators in schools with many minority and poor students;
- ◆ Using data and research to drive instruction; and,
- ◆ Supporting other best practices that include a literacy focus, more individualized learning, mentoring and peer networks, student health, and access to technology.

To move this effort forward, state law directs the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to assist schools with significant achievement gaps using different strategies. These strategies include looking at data by race and family income to set academic improvement targets, providing professional development practices for all educators, increasing parental knowledge and skill, and monitoring schools' progress toward proficiency. CDE must also help schools identify leaders who specialize in improving failing schools, examine changes in school systems and develop a plan to address learning gaps.

Over the next year, the commission will be working with state education organizations, business groups and foundations to form action steps for each recommendation.

To learn more about the Closing the Achievement Gap Commission, please visit www.jaredpolisfoundation.org

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NetSmartz.org

Boys & Girls Clubs of America partnered with the National Center for Missing and Exploited Children to ensure that kids are safe online. Through this partnership, they created NetSmartz. NetSmartz is a FREE, interactive tool that has been proven to increase kids' online safety awareness. Age appropriate activities teach youth ages 5 to 17 the skills they need to use the internet safely and responsibly.

Parents, educators and students can access this vital program at www.netsmartz.com



DPA Charter Opens August 2005

DPA Charter School, the only charter school approved by Denver Public Schools in 2004, will open its doors in August 2005 to 40 students, many of whom are homeless. DPA Charter School will utilize the comprehensive social services of the school's partner, Urban Peak Denver. DPA was founded by the Jared Polis Foundation in partnership with Urban Peak Denver.

DPA Charter School's three goals include increasing the number of marginalized youth who earn their high school diploma, increasing the number of high school students who effectively show post-secondary readiness, and providing students with inclusive services through Urban Peak Denver. In its first year, the school will be located at 1630 South Acoma Street in Denver, directly across the street from the Urban Peak Denver shelter; this close location will make it convenient for students to access their case managers and social service needs while working toward completing high school and transitioning into post-secondary education. By its fourth year, DPA Charter School plans to grow to 130 students.

If you are interested in learning more about DPA Charter School, please contact Gina Nocera, Education Program Director at the Jared Polis Foundation, at gina@jaredpolisfoundation.org or 303.442.1130 x118.

Universal High School at Silver Creek

The Universal High School at Silver Creek, a project of St Vrain Valley School District, is an alternative path to a high school diploma. It is not a separate school but a different way to complete a high school education. Instead of completing credits based on hours, students graduate after demonstrating knowledge of specific standards. Students select from a variety of learning experiences, including traditional classes, on-line courses, independent study, college-level classes, mentorships or work study.

This program was designed for students who have potential for high levels of achievement but need a more flexible and less-structured experience than a traditional classroom.

Benefits of the program include:

- ♦ Greater independence and flexibility in program design;
- ♦ Wider access to educational experiences outside of the school setting;
- ♦ A non-traditional education that still provides the essentials;
- ♦ Continued access to public school classes and extracurricular activities; and,
- ♦ A sense of belonging with like-minded students.

As one student stated, "At Universal we learn to become who we want to be, not who other people think we should be."

For more information, contact Kiesa Kay, Program Coordinator, at 720.494.3721 x5762 or visit their website at <http://www.stvrain.k12.co.us/Universal/>



Colorado High School Commission

Due to Colorado's low high school graduation rates, the Colorado Commission on High School Improvement was formed last summer to address critical issues. The commission was convened by the Colorado Children's Campaign and is chaired by Jared Polis, Vice-Chairman of the State Board of Education, and University of Colorado Regent Pat Hayes.

While the state succeeds in many areas of public education, too many students do not complete high school, and many of those who do are unprepared for college. State dropout rates are third worst in the country¹ and Colorado ranks near the bottom in sending its recent high school graduates on to higher education². Less than a third of Colorado high school students score proficient or above on CSAP math scores.

To help improve these outcomes the 27-member commission recently released a preliminary report that makes state and local recommendations in key areas. The recommendations are intended to support student engagement and success in high school, meet individual student needs, and promote access to higher education.

Commission members have already met with legislative leaders and other policymakers to take action on the recommendations. The final report will include additional recommendations that are mainly targeted to local decision-makers.

Commission recommendations focus on improving student achievement and reducing achievement gaps, improving student transitions to and from high school, and expanding alternatives and student choices. These recommendations include:

- ♦ Creating consistent statewide calculations for dropout and graduation rates;
- ♦ Requiring all high school students to apply to a four-year college or community college;
- ♦ Aligning high school graduation and college admission standards;
- ♦ Improving guidance and support to high school students;
- ♦ Supporting in-state tuition and state financial aid to all high school graduates;
- ♦ Encouraging school flexibility over budget, personnel and program decisions;
- ♦ Improving data to assess high school performance; and,
- ♦ Empowering parents and students to make informed school choices.

The commission will meet until this fall when it plans to release its final report, which will include feedback from students, teachers, and businesses who will present to the commission during upcoming meetings.

To request a copy of the commission's report, please visit www.jaredpolisfoundation.org

¹ Annie E. Casey Foundation, Kids Count 2004 Data Book Online.

² National Center for Public Policy and Higher Education, Measuring Up 2004: The State Report Card on Higher Education, Colorado, (Compare States: Index Scores - Participation - 2004).

For more information, visit
www.jaredpolisfoundation.org

Colorado's Charter School Institute

Colorado has a new way to approve charter schools, which are semi-independently run public schools with a specific focus. Last year the legislature established the Charter School Institute (CSI) as a statewide authorizer to increase the state's public school options, particularly for students at risk of academic failure.

The CSI cannot authorize charter schools in all districts. State law gives the State Board of Education very specific criteria to decide which districts the CSI covers - generally large districts that have historically resisted charter applications. Most districts retain "exclusive authority" over chartering, which means that in these districts applicants continue to apply to their local districts only. If the district denies them, they may appeal that decision to the State Board of Education.

If a district lacks exclusive authority, charter founders may still apply to their local district, but they may now also apply to the CSI. Districts that lack exclusive authority and therefore may be covered by the CSI include: Boulder Valley RE 2, Harrison 2, Poudre R-1, Westminster 50, Brighton 27J, Colorado Springs 11, Delta County 50(J), Eagle County RE 50, Falcon 49, Mesa County Valley 51, and Roaring Fork RE-1.

Some educational groups are concerned that the CSI law takes away the chartering power of local school boards, which they view as more informed about their community. They also argue that the CSI erodes the constitutional guarantee of locally-elected school boards making instruction-related decisions by giving chartering authority to an unelected CSI board.

Others say that the CSI is needed because some districts haven't given charter schools fair consideration and that it provides more school choices for parents and students, which can enhance the educational system.

The CSI has received 11 applications from groups hoping to open schools in the fall 2005. The CSI board recently approved two applicants, denied eight, and preliminarily approved one other.

The CSI, governed by a nine-person board, aims to be a fair and competent body that districts can look to for assistance and advice in their own authorizing activities.

To learn more about the Charter School Institute, please visit www.jaredpolisfoundation.org

Jared Polis Foundation

The Jared Polis Foundation works to build strong communities by supporting education throughout the state of Colorado. We believe education is the source of strength, growth and sustenance of our state. We promote high standards in education through five main approaches: (1) providing technology resources through the Community Computer Connection public charity so that schools and non-profits can be successful in their work, (2) promoting school reform and helping to open alternative schools of choice for those with unique needs through Colorado Youth Charity, (3) encouraging and inspiring educators in their work through appreciation gifts and grant making opportunities, (4) informing the public of policies and events impacting education in Colorado through our education report, and (5) supporting community members with educational opportunities through our mobile classroom, the Education Station.



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