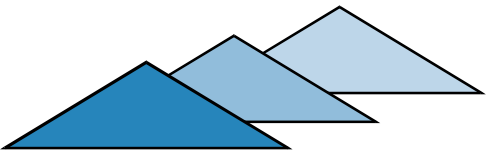


QUALITY TEACHING IN COLORADO

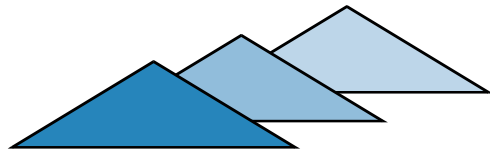
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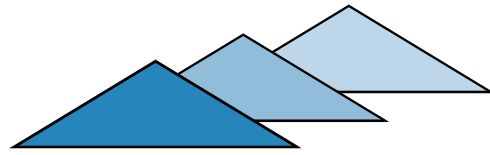
The Alliance for Quality Teaching

The Colorado Department of Education

The Colorado Partnership for
Educational Renewal



March 2003



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About the Organizations

The Alliance for Quality Teaching

The Alliance for Quality Teaching is a bipartisan group of policymakers, stakeholders and practitioners gathered to ensure that Colorado children have a quality teacher in every classroom, every day. The Alliance believes quality teaching is the most important factor in improving student achievement and quality teaching is dependent on high quality preparation, comprehensive recruitment strategies, induction and ongoing professional development.

In order to fulfill the promise of quality teaching in Colorado, the Alliance:

- Makes data driven recommendations on reforming teaching policies and practices across Colorado and ensure their implementation and evaluation.
- Spurs conversation and builds support across Colorado about the importance of teaching quality and provides a forum where issues related to teaching quality can be discussed.
- Provides policymakers and practitioners with research, promising practices from within Colorado and other states to influence the reform of teaching policies and practices across Colorado.

Colorado Department of Education

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) is the administrative arm of the Colorado State Board of Education. CDE serves Colorado's 178 local school districts, providing them with leadership, consultation and administrative services on a statewide and regional basis. CDE is made up of more than 40 units, 25 different programs and 300-plus staff members, all pursuing the department's organizational commitment to high standards, tough assessments and rigorous accountability measures. In keeping with this commitment, the department not only administers K-12 public education, but also the state library system, family/adult literacy efforts, and the Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind.

Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal

Formed in 1986, the Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal (CoPER or the Partnership) is one of 21 settings in the National Network for Educational Renewal. The sixteen CoPER member school districts educate more than 50 percent of Colorado's public school students. The member institutes of higher education, seven of which are public colleges or universities and one which is a private university, collectively



prepare more than 80 percent of new teachers prepared in Colorado. Driven by the goal of simultaneous renewal, CoPER partners have worked together for 17 years to improve public education and teacher preparation through collaborative efforts such as the development of professional development

schools where teacher educators, arts and sciences faculty, and public school educators come together to prepare new teachers, enhance the practice of veteran teachers, conduct research on education issues, and promote excellent education for all students.



Preface

In the late spring of 2002, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) Special Education Services Unit received word that it had been awarded a grant for the purpose of convening a statewide summit focused on issues of professional development and quality education. Sponsored by the federally-funded, IDEA Partnerships, the competition afforded states the opportunity to replicate a model similar to the *National Summit on the Shared Implementation of IDEA* held in Washington, D.C., in June 2000. Grants were made possible through the support of the Office of Special Education Programs at the U.S. Department of Education. Colorado's proposal, entitled *Colorado ASCENDS*, highlighted significant challenges in assuring a sufficient supply of qualified personnel and high quality practitioners to serve students with disabilities. When faced with the requirements of IDEA (*Individuals with Disabilities Act*) coupled with the tenets of *No Child Left Behind*, it became clear that Colorado needed new responses to the complexities inherent in preparing, recruiting, and retaining the highest quality educators.

The Colorado proposal promised to involve stakeholders statewide in discussions that would inform the content and format of the Summit. The Colorado Regional Professional Development Councils, existing in each of

Colorado's eight regions, were the vehicle chosen for gathering stakeholder comments and information. While anticipating this data-collection process, communication with the Denver-based, Alliance for Quality Teaching and the Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal proved fortunate. At the time, as a feature of one of its current projects, the Alliance was undertaking a series of regional meetings to discuss issues that would have an impact on teaching quality. The Colorado Partnership, having completed an extensive study of new teacher induction, was seeking to disseminate findings and launch a state wide discussion about induction in Colorado. The coincidence of these events provided a perfect opportunity to combine the foci of special education and general education in their joint need for highly qualified practitioners who could engage in high-quality teaching. A series of eleven colloquia (public discussions) was planned to take place in September through November 2002. Sites were selected based on region, accessibility, travel requirements, population density, and similar factors.

The Alliance, the CDE and the Colorado Partnership all have as a goal ensuring high quality instruction for every student in Colorado. It is not a challenge easily met, but requires the

complementary efforts of a host of institutions and organizations. In planning both the series of colloquia and the culminating April 2003 Summit, coordinators enlisted the efforts and advice of a number of key, state-level partners including: the Alliance for Quality Teaching and its member organizations, the Colorado Association of School Boards, the Colorado Partnership's member districts and institutions, the Colorado Rural Schools Caucus, the Colorado Special Education Advisory Committee, the Colorado State Board of Education, the Education Commission of the States, Mid-Continent Research for Education and Learning, the Public Education and Business Coalition, and various institutions of higher education.

The colloquia were designed to focus the attention of educators, policymakers, and the public on the challenge of assuring uniformly high quality teaching for all students in Colorado and to find out what Coloradans think about that challenge. Colloquia were held in cities or towns in each of Colorado's eight regions: Northeast (Akron), Southwest (Alamosa and Durango), Metro (Castle Rock and Wheat Ridge), Pikes Peak (Colorado Springs), North Central (Fort Collins), West Central (Grand Junction), Southeast (Pueblo), and Northwest

(Silverthorne and Steamboat Springs). Each colloquium, conducted by a team of ASCENDS coordinators, followed a similar format: an introduction to the project and purpose of the colloquia, presentation of state and national data relevant to the issues, facilitated small group discussions, and a plenary discussion. The plenary discussion in each meeting was moderated by Eric Hirsch, Executive Director of the Alliance for Quality Teaching. Michael Briand, formerly Director of Policy and Research for the Public Education and Business Coalition, was retained to conduct a qualitative analysis of the discussion and to prepare a report of his findings and conclusions. Other members of the ASCENDS team participating in each colloquium included Elizabeth Parmelee, Associate Director, Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal; Lois Adams, Supervisor, Colorado Department of Education; and Faye Gibson, Senior Consultant, Colorado Department of Education.

The report following this Preface is a summary of the issues addressed at each colloquium and the ensuing dialogue. The information contained herein has been used to design the April 2003 meeting—Colorado ASCENDS: A Statewide Summit on Quality Teaching.

Executive Summary

In the fall of 2002, eleven regional colloquia were held across Colorado to discuss the current quality of teaching in Colorado. The Alliance for Quality Teaching, the Colorado Department of Education, and the Colorado Partnership for Educational Renewal worked together to convene discussions and gather feedback from participants to inform the content and format of a state wide summit being held on April 4, 2003. This report, *Quality Teaching in Colorado: Views from the Field*, is the result of these eleven colloquia. It suggests that Coloradoans see both strengths and challenges in ensuring high quality instruction for every student in Colorado. While participants agreed that most teachers are good, some lack the skills they need to teach all students and others have lost the passion that is required to be effective. Participants identified three general challenges to meeting the goal of high quality teaching across the state:

1. Recruiting and hiring enough high-quality candidates for teaching positions;
2. Evaluating and developing the knowledge and skills of current new and veteran teachers; and
3. Retaining the highest quality teachers while reeducating and/or removing those teachers who do not perform at quality standards.

In each of these three areas, Colorado and its individual districts have both strengths and weaknesses. Participants expressed concern about **teacher preparation, compensation and career appeal** as factors that influence recruitment and early success of new teachers. They also identified both obstacles and promising models in the areas of **evaluation and professional development**. With the adoption of statewide content standards and testing it is more important than ever that teachers have the skill to diagnose and respond to each student's individual learning needs. Yet this and other important teaching skills are developed over time through high quality professional development that is not always available to teachers across Colorado. Finally, participants expressed major concerns about the **retention** of high quality teachers, particularly new teachers, through supportive **induction and mentoring programs** and the **non-retention** of the few teachers who do not perform satisfactorily.

Participants in the colloquia recommended a variety of strategies for moving forward with ensuring high quality teaching across Colorado:

- Teachers need more time to plan and problem-solve together and individually;

- The process of granting a Colorado license to out-of-state teachers should be made easier;
- The number of high quality candidates in Colorado teacher education programs should be increased;
- The state should cut back on the requirements placed on schools and districts;
- The issues of “tenure” needs to be resolved;
- Teacher salaries should be raised.

Working together at local and state policy levels Coloradans are able to implement changes and programs that will ensure high quality teaching across Colorado. The ASCENDS Colloquia and Summit are one step along the way to achieving this goal.



Introduction

Teaching quality has been preeminent on the education agenda of state and local policymakers for almost a decade, catalyzed by impending teacher shortages and the emerging research on the importance of teaching quality in raising student achievement. In recent years Colorado has created new performance standards for teachers (SB 99-154), revamped teacher preparation, created a loan forgiveness program for hard to staff subjects and appropriated funds to help attract teachers to low and unsatisfactory schools. Despite these efforts, Colorado districts still face a daunting task in meeting the challenges of recruiting and retaining high quality teachers. Consider the following:

- It is projected that the state will need to hire approximately 6,500 teachers annually over the next decade.¹ However, fewer than 2,000 teachers are licensed from Colorado preparation programs, creating a heavy reliance on those prepared in alternative programs and through out of state programs that do not need to meet the same requirements prescribed under SB 99-154.
- 22 percent of teachers left their school last year. While many stayed in the same district, half of those teachers left the state or the

profession all together. The most commonly cited reason for wanting to quit were salary concerns, lack of administrative support, and stress.²

- Different regions of the state will face different challenges, making a statewide solution difficult. For example, the southeast region currently has the lowest school attrition rate for teachers (19 percent), yet it has the most teachers eligible for retirement over the next five years (24 percent) and the lowest starting salaries in the state (\$22,591 for no experience and no M.A. degree). Districts in the metro area, where more than half of the state's teacher work, have many, traditionally difficult-to-staff, high poverty schools, but have the highest starting and average salaries in the state.³

Exacerbating this challenge is the federal *No Child Left Behind Act* and its call for "highly qualified" teachers in core academic subjects in all schools across the country by the end of the 2005-2006 school year (and immediately for Title I schools). Rural areas of Colorado are likely to feel disproportionately the impact of these requirements. With small schools and a limited number of teachers, those who have been generalists teaching multiple subjects by necessity, will now need the equiva-

lent of an academic major or be required to pass the state's content test for every content area they teach.

No Child Left Behind does include resources to help districts meet these new requirements, including over \$32 million in funds dedicated exclusively to enhancing educator quality. These resources will be necessary. Currently Colorado relies on districts to create and fund programs to recruit and retain teachers. Clearly, there are broad disparities in districts' ability to fund and implement such programs. States such as South Carolina have state-funded recruitment centers that begin outreach to potential teachers as early as middle school, providing scholarships for preparation and giving significant incentives to teach in subject shortage areas and high needs schools. Not only does this put Colorado at a disadvantage relative to other states, it leads to inequities across districts in their ability to meet the mandates of NCLB. Similarly, while teachers are required to participate in an induction and

mentoring program to attain a professional license, the state does not provide districts with funding to support such programs, creating great variation in the duration and quality of induction that new teachers receive. Sixteen states both require and fund mentoring, with seven states requiring release time for mentors and eight states ensuring that mentors and teachers be matched by school, subject or grade level.⁴

Many Colorado districts have created innovative approaches to help ensure that all of their students have both highly qualified and high quality teachers in all of their schools. This project sought to identify the challenges faced by districts in different regions across Colorado in recruiting and retaining teachers; to document promising district practices that could potentially be replicated or scaled up to a state level; and to gather feedback and recommendations for state policymakers and stakeholders about what is needed most in different settings across Colorado.

Findings

What Is a High-Quality Teacher?

To begin each discussion, participants were asked to enumerate the characteristics of a teacher whose work with her¹ students is high quality. It was emphasized that a “high-quality” teacher may be different from one who would be regarded as “highly qualified” under the federal *No Child Left Behind* Act. For example, a teacher who is highly qualified—i.e., who possesses qualifications such as an advanced degree, many years of teaching experience, or multiple content-area endorsements—may not, solely by virtue of those qualifications, achieve a level of professional performance that would warrant the characterization high quality. Conversely, a teacher conceivably might perform at a high level and yet lack some of the qualifications that typically would be associated with the descriptor highly qualified.

Participants in the eleven colloquia agreed substantially on the elements of high quality teaching, and hence on the characteristics of a high quality teacher. In their estimation, high quality teaching begins with two passions: *the passion for the subject matter taught*, and *the passion for teaching it to young people*.

In terms of teaching characteristics, a high-quality teacher:

- Understands that the measure of effective teaching is successful learning;
- Recognizes that the effectiveness of her efforts depends on the relationship she enjoys with her students;
- Assesses each of her student’s readiness to learn in terms of cognitive, behavioral, and emotional development;
- Understands how her students learn and why they may fail to learn;
- Identifies students’ academic strengths and weaknesses;
- Knows how to select and employ appropriate instructional strategies, techniques, and tools depending upon the students’ individual needs and capacities;
- Seeks continual feedback from her students;
- Uses appropriate diagnostic tools to assess student progress;
- Observes her students carefully;
- Makes connections with each student on his/her own terms.
- Reflects on her abilities, her skills, and her effectiveness critically and with an eye to constant improvement;
- Adheres to and is encouraging of high standards;
- Holds high expectations of herself, her colleagues, her students, and their parents;
- Communicates clearly and effectively; and

- Is dedicated, persistent, and determined, yet open-minded, flexible, and adaptable.

Is Teaching in Colorado High Quality?

In each of the eleven colloquia, participants reported that, in their estimation, the quality of instruction offered by Colorado teachers is generally quite good. Overall, teachers are knowledgeable and dedicated. Most of them work hard and strive to improve. All groups participating in the colloquia—parents, teachers, administrators, policymakers—felt teachers, in particular in their own region, were skilled professionals.

However, when asked more specifically about whether all children in every school had such high quality teachers, participants acknowledged that there were examples of teachers—those without a passion for teaching, those not well prepared, those who had become complacent with their own improvement—in many schools across their region and the state.

Pressed to put a number to these general impressions, a district administrator who attended the discussion in **Fort Collins** ventured that “60 percent [of Colorado teachers] are excellent. An additional 30 to 35 percent are ‘highly qualified.’ Maybe 5 to 10 percent aren’t really up to snuff.” Other participants put the percentage of teachers who aren’t performing satisfactorily closer to 1 to 3 percent.

According to participants, quality teachers are not equally available across the various fields and specialties of the profession. They noted that qualified teachers are most difficult to find in special education, foreign languages, science, math, and industrial arts. The number of qualified teachers varies as well according to level and location—it is harder to attain a sufficient supply of teachers in middle schools than in elementary schools; in rural and urban areas than in Front Range suburbs. For the most part, this unevenness is a function of supply and demand. For example, a **Fort Collins** participant observed, “there are hundreds of applications for elementary school positions, a few to none in special education.” Similarly, a principal who participated in the **Steamboat Springs** colloquium reported, “We get 15 to 25 applications for most positions, 6 to 7 for math, fewer than 6 for special ed. Of these, half aren’t worth considering and are eliminated immediately.”

When quality is tough to come by, then, it’s often because there just aren’t enough attractive applicants—at least at the time a hiring decision has to be made. As an administrator who attended the **Durango** session observed, “well-prepared, motivated applicants are applying for jobs—they’re just not always the first ones interviewed.” A participant in **Akron** noted that is not always easy to “separate a quality teacher from a nice person.”

What Is the Problem?

In general terms, the difficulties districts and the state face in achieving and maintaining a uniformly high level of teaching quality owes to three basic challenges:

1. Recruiting and hiring enough high-quality candidates for teaching positions;
2. Evaluating and developing the knowledge and skills of current new and veteran teachers; and
3. Retaining the highest quality teachers while reeducating and/or removing those teachers who do not perform at quality standards.

The Recruitment and Hiring Challenge

Every year, Colorado schools must fill approximately 6,500 teaching vacancies. Roughly half of these positions are filled by teachers from out-of-state who have acquired a Colorado license. The remaining vacancies are filled by new teachers prepared in Colorado, by both alternative preparation programs and traditional preparation offered by institutions of higher education.²

Teacher Preparation. Most colloquium participants believe that the public schools in our state continue to get well-prepared, new teachers. They think Colorado's colleges of education are doing a *better* job today of preparing new teachers than they were just a few years ago, in large measure because teacher education has been made more rigorous since the passage

of Senate Bill 154 in 1999; legislation that mandated 800 hours of clinical experience in teacher preparation programs. However, despite improved quality, many participants believe that Colorado colleges and universities are not producing enough new teachers with sufficient knowledge and skills to hit the ground running and enhance student learning.

Concern about the efficacy of Colorado teacher education programs was expressed in a number of colloquia. An administrator who attended the **Colorado Springs** session offered that “not all teacher education programs are high quality.” Similarly, a **Grand Junction** participant observed that “all teacher preparation programs are not equal. They are not always as selective as they should be in accepting prospective teachers.” A **Wheat Ridge** participant argued that colleges need to do a better job of screening their students: “We need to ... sort out the ones who shouldn't become teachers ... too many teachers, especially young ones, don't appreciate what's involved in teaching.”

Meeting participants had different reasons for being critical of teacher preparation programs. Colleges of education “have overemphasized pedagogical skills,” according to a participant in the **Alamosa** discussion. Others, however, thought that some preparation programs had not done enough to instill teaching skills in their graduates. An

“While most new teachers are well-prepared, a few need almost complete re-training.”

—Steamboat Springs colloquium participant

“Mostly new teachers ... need mentoring ... with respect to [matters such as] class management.”

—Steamboat Springs participant

administrator who attended the **Wheat Ridge** meeting thought that, “education schools are not yet modeling the teaching methods that new teachers will need.” Asked about her experience in one of the state’s leading teacher education programs, a student in the final year of her studies replied that “most teachers are responsive and engaged most of the time. Some aren’t approachable. Some can’t convey knowledge effectively.” Her classmate, who also participated in the **Colorado Springs** discussion, reported that there is too little focus on class management. Maybe “one day in four years” of preparation is devoted to such nuts-and-bolts topics.

While specific programs were not singled out, an administrator who attended the **Wheat Ridge** colloquium believed that, “teacher education programs are not very receptive to feedback about the preparation of their graduates from the districts that hire them.” Meeting participants were sympathetic, however, to the challenges that state policy has created for preparation programs. An **Alamosa** participant observed that “higher education is caught between the requirement to get students through in 120 hours on one hand, and increasingly performance-based standards on the other.” As a result, a **Pueblo** participant suggested, “the preparation students receive may be too wide and not deep enough.” Teacher education programs might benefit from better communication and closer working

“Alternative-license teachers tend to have fewer pedagogical and practical skills. They are harder to retain and less likely to get experience.”
—*Colorado Springs participant*

relationships with the school districts that employ many of their graduates. An administrator who joined the discussion in **Grand Junction** remarked that “the best students come from institutions that partner with school districts.”

The lack of well-trained teacher candidates appears to be especially severe in special education. An administrator who attended the **Silverthorne** meeting observed that “our need for [well-prepared special education teachers] exceeds the supply. Not all special ed teachers are well-trained.” Although their “content knowledge is generally good to excellent, [they] don’t get enough [pre-service] practice, and they’re not prepared for the realities of typical special-needs classrooms.” An administrator who participated in the **Alamosa** discussion agreed: “In special education, some teachers can reach all kids, some cannot. Teachers need pedagogical skills differentiated for different student needs. They’re better prepared today, but the needs of students are outpacing their skills. Higher education needs to prepare these teachers better.”

There was an intense response to a question about alternative routes to teacher licensure: Does combining academic study with on-the-job training have the capacity to produce high-quality teachers necessary to meet the demand? Despite having alternative preparation programs since 1991, it may be too soon to know. As a **Durango** administrator

noted, “alternative routes are relatively new and not yet well-developed.” Precisely for this reason, however, an administrator who attended the colloquium in **Steamboat Springs** worried that “alternative route teachers may not have all the skills they need.” A **Fort Collins** participant noted that being trained while teaching is particularly problematic when a teacher is assigned to a position of the hard-to-fill variety (e.g., high-need students in low-performing, high-need schools). Regardless, with the number of alternatively prepared teaching candidates growing from 44 a decade ago to 982 for the 2002-2003, more districts will be considering teachers who have entered the profession through non-traditional routes.³

Teacher Compensation. Salary considerations weigh heavily with Coloradans as they decide whether to become and—even more importantly—remain teachers. As participants in the majority of colloquia noted, especially outside the Front Range, and outside the **Denver** metro area in particular, low starting pay influences significantly the decisions of candidates to consider open positions. An administrator at the **Steamboat Springs** colloquium said “the high cost of living makes it tough to recruit teachers, and even more so to retain them.” In the **Silverthorne** discussion, an administrator reported that the starting salary in Summit County—\$30,000 per year—has helped increase the number of applicants. She noted, however, that the ability of districts in her region to retain teachers remains a challenge. “At around six years,” she

said, “teachers conclude that they can’t afford to live in Pitkin, Summit, or Eagle County. The rural areas, although somewhat cheaper, don’t pay as well.” In **Akron**, one participant noted, “No one wants to come to rural areas as the salaries are low and there are no medical facilities. The economy is so poor that if a spouse has to leave then the teacher has to follow.”

Career Appeal. For many talented applicants, financial incentives (e.g., attractive starting salary, signing bonuses) by themselves prove inadequate. A **Grand Junction** participant asserted, “Working conditions, time [spent on the job], and facilities are not optimal.” Moreover, another participant observed, “the profession is not held in the highest public esteem.” A member of the **Wheat Ridge** group furthered, “Generally speaking, parents and other members of the public do not understand academic standards, and have no idea what kinds of needs many students bring to school today.” A teacher in **Grand Junction** observed that “teaching is a highly political career”—one that readily draws politically motivated criticism from policymakers, the media, and the public.

In **Steamboat Springs**, an administrator explained that in small towns and rural areas young, single teachers are hard to keep because there are few people like them. Life in small towns and rural areas is appreciated best by teachers with families and those who have grown up in such places. While life far from the city and suburbs has its compensations, in general they do not

offset the perceived disadvantages that make it tough to recruit and retain teachers who are in the early stages of their careers.

The Evaluation and Professional Development Challenge

The second major obstacle to achieving and maintaining a uniformly high level of teaching quality in Colorado is the lack of high-quality teacher evaluation and professional development. While

“Principals don’t have the time or training to evaluate teachers. If principals had these, tenure wouldn’t be a problem.”

—Colorado Springs participant

all teachers must have the equivalent of 90 clock hours of professional development every five years to renew a professional license, the quantity and quality of opportunities appears to vary significantly across districts. One study found that district spending on professional development

ranged from .001 percent to 7 percent of total district expenditures, leaving some teachers without the opportunity to update their knowledge and skills continually.⁴

Evaluation. Participants in the eleven colloquia consistently reported that the evaluation teachers receive is far from what it needs to be. An administrator who attended the **Alamosa** session indicated that “evaluation is not helping teachers identify their own needs and weaknesses.” A counterpart of his in **Durango** said that, “evaluations are not conducted by skilled evaluators and are not as frank as they should be.” A chief reason for this is that most evaluation is done by principals, who are over-extended and who receive little or no

training in teacher evaluation. Thus, a participant in the **Steamboat Springs** discussion remarked that “evaluation of teachers by principals is generally not extensive or sophisticated.” As a consequence, “it’s hard to know how teachers are doing and how to help them.” A superintendent who attended the **Silverthorne** session agreed: “Principals ... get no induction, mentoring, or professional development.” An administrator who participated in the **Fort Collins** colloquium pointed out that the problem with evaluation is not always lack of a good system: “Our evaluation system is good—it’s designed to help teachers grow—but it’s not being used fully, properly, and universally...[because] there’s not enough time and expertise.”

Professional Development. Few educators would disagree with the administrator who asserted during the discussion in **Grand Junction** that “all teachers could improve.” Nor would they dissent from the view, expressed by a **Durango** participant that “all teachers would benefit from high-quality professional development.” National standards by groups such as the National Staff Development Council, recommend that professional development be:

- Tailored to the individual needs of each teacher;
- Embedded in his or her regular duties and responsibilities;
- Connected to the academic goals of his or her school;
- Linked to both student content standards and to teaching performance standards; and

- Supported by solid empirical research attesting to its effectiveness.⁵

Unfortunately, Colorado teachers receive little in the way of professional development (especially professional development supported by their school, school district, or the state), and much of what they do receive fails to measure up to current expectations for high-quality in-service education and training. A teacher who attended the colloquium in **Alamosa** lamented that “professional development is not enabling teachers to continue improving throughout their career.” This is particularly essential given the number of Colorado teachers prepared prior to the advent of student standards and assessments.

Meeting participants argued that much of the professional development available to teachers has not kept pace with changes in public education that have occurred over the past ten to fifteen years. In Colorado, the adoption of statewide academic content standards, school accountability and now the *No Child Left Behind Act* have combined to place the individual student learner at the center of educational policy and practice. Accordingly, commented a participant in the **Silverthorne** discussion, “teachers need skills to evaluate and to teach each child effectively.” Similarly, a **Wheat Ridge** partici-

“The [public education] system is not set up to allow and promote change, growth and learning in teachers.”
—Wheat Ridge participant

“Teachers at the middle and high school levels are now having to learn to diagnose the basic skills of their students and to remediate or continue developing their students’ basic skills through the subject matter they teach.”
—Grand Junction participant

pant observed that “the emphasis on individually-tailored diagnosis of and response to student learning requires more knowledge, skills, techniques, and time.”

One commonly cited challenge in providing high quality professional development, observed a teacher who attended the **Colorado Springs** meeting, is that it is offered in the form of stand-alone or “pull-out” activities that may bear little or no relationship to the needs of the teacher and his or her school. Given time and resource constraints, opportunities for participants to acquire and practice new skills consistently throughout the school week, year and over the span of a teaching career are infrequent. In addition, what an **Alamosa** special education director termed education “fad-ism” creates a ready market for the selling and buying of the latest “new thing,” regardless of whether it is relevant to the needs of the teacher, the students, and the school.

At present, a teacher pointed out in **Grand Junction**, “most professional development is not geared to teacher needs. Teachers need to be able to set individual goals based on their particular needs.” But while professional development should be individualized, others felt that teachers should not be consumers of any professional development offered. A **Wheat Ridge**

participant agreed that “professional development should not be a matter of complete choice for [teachers], because not all professional development is useful.” Useful professional development, in the estimation of a **Colorado Springs** participant, would be “built around performance, practice, and skill-development.” Professional development “should not be treated or seen as something extra for teachers to do outside the classroom,” a **Wheat Ridge** participant argued. It should be part and parcel of every teacher’s ongoing activity in the classroom.

One practical obstacle to providing “embedded” professional development during the regular workday and work-week, according to a **Steamboat Springs**-area administrator, is that “not enough substitutes [teachers] are available to enable us to give teachers days for professional development.” Another constraint is the public perception that days spent out of the classroom for professional development are days that students are not learning, whether or not a teacher’s knowledge or skills grow as a result.

The Retention and “Non-Retention” Challenges

The third major obstacle to Colorado’s ability to achieve and maintain a uniformly high level of teaching quality is the difficulty school districts are encountering in retaining teachers who perform at a high level.

“Weak induction programs and poor or inadequate mentoring socialize new teachers into bad habits.”
—Fort Collins administrator

Induction and Mentoring. A more diversely prepared pool of teaching candidates—alternatively prepared, out of state, *etc.*—has, according to several participants, increased the importance of induction programs for, and mentoring of, newly hired teachers. A principal who attended the colloquium in **Colorado Springs** observed that “the problem [which induction and mentoring should address] is not [content] knowledge, but...instructional skills. ...Teachers need support; veterans and beginners especially.” Induction and mentoring are especially crucial for first-year teachers, who “get loaded down with duties outside of what they’re prepared to do. For example, they get the toughest classes.”

Despite the indispensability of high-quality induction and mentoring, “the time and money required are not available,” according to one **Silverthorne** participant. Further, a principal who attended the **Colorado Springs** session explained that lack of time and money are not the only problem: “There are not enough teachers with experience and skill to mentor all the others who need it. Too many demands are made on [the few who have the requisite experience and skill].”

Meeting participants often used the term “unfunded mandate,” when describing the need to provide induction to new teachers for them to attain a professional license, but receiving no support from the state. There was broad recognition across colloquia that

induction was an essential component to retaining the teachers hired, but frustration that districts did not have the resources and capacity to make the experience as meaningful for new teachers as possible by providing release time for mentors and new teachers to work together and providing sufficient mentor training.

The Demands of the Job. Teachers “are facing an increasingly difficult job without corresponding preparation and support,” argued a teacher during the discussion in **Silverthorne**. As an **Alamosa** teacher lamented, “many teachers have levels of commitment and potential that are not being developed and supported.” During the discussion in **Durango** a teacher remarked that many teachers, both novice and veteran, are daunted by the task of managing and teaching multiple classes having 30 or more students. Grading the papers and tests of so many students consumes evenings and entire weekends. Yet even in smaller classes, a Grand Junction participant pointed out, the wide range of student readiness to learn creates difficulties for teachers. As a result, an Alamosa participant explained, “we’re not achieving uniform high-quality because we’re aiming at the middle, leaving the gifted and talented and special education children behind.” At the **Wheat Ridge** session, a teacher emphasized that having to cope with the growing number and severity of students’ behavioral problems saps teachers’ energy. “They are left discouraged, and feeling inad-

“It’s unrealistic to create the super teachers needed to ensure that every child succeeds, especially those most at-risk of being left behind.”
—Fort Collins participant

equate and ill-suited to the burdens they are increasingly expected to shoulder.”

As if these difficulties weren’t enough in themselves, they are often compounded by cultural and linguistic diversity. A special education administrator who attended the colloquium in **Silverthorne** offered that “cultural diversity and special needs are presenting challenges to an unprecedented degree for which traditional preparation is inadequate.” A host of other factors were cited by meeting participants as increasing the demands of teaching across Colorado.

- According to a **Grand Junction** administrator, too many teachers are being forced to teach subjects outside the field in which they majored or minored in college.

This is especially true in middle schools and in small or rural districts, and in content areas such as math and science.

- A **Durango** participant noted that teachers do not have enough time for preparation and planning.
- In **Steamboat Springs**, a teacher pointed out that: “Too many parents do not set high expectations for their children and are not involved in their academic life.”

The Loss of Passion. The demands of the job combined with the lack of support teachers receive with respect to induction, evaluation, and professional development, are causing more and

more teachers to lose energy and enthusiasm for the job. An administrator who participated in the **Silverthorne**

“We miss opportunities to take advantage of individual teacher’s strengths and talents, and hence passions. There is a danger of rigidity, of putting people into boxes and keeping them there.”

—Grand Junction participant

meeting admitted that “teachers get frustrated, burned out. Keeping them motivated is a concern.”

Some teachers lose their motivation faster than others. For a few, being forced to teach out of their field results in the lack of passion for the subject matter they must convey. For others, having to

take a job because it is the only one offered leads to disenchantment with their school, the subject(s) they teach, or their students. But even good teachers can get frustrated. A **Grand Junction** participant noted, “to be at their best constantly is likely to burn teachers out faster.”

“Tenure”—the “Non-Retention” Challenge. Whether the problem is inadequate preparation, demands of the job, lack of professional support, or a mistaken career choice, the fact is that there are some teachers, albeit few, in Colorado who should not be in the classroom. These teachers are not performing at a high level or helping their students achieve.

In Colorado, teachers do not enjoy a lifetime guarantee of employment (*i.e.*, tenure). Nevertheless, many argue that provisions in the law make it costly and time-consuming to remove teachers who are not performing satisfactorily from the

classroom, referring to these “due process” provisions as akin to tenure.

An administrator who joined in the **Wheat Ridge** discussion stated that “Tenure is a factor. It must be easier to dismiss manifestly bad teachers.” A **Steamboat Springs** principal agreed: “The reality is that non-probationary teachers can’t be removed except for extreme and flagrant errors. It takes 10 to 15 years to accumulate the necessary evidence.” Tenure is a problem especially in small rural districts, an **Alamosa** participant noted. A **Steamboat Springs** principal agreed: “It’s harder in small communities to get rid of bad teachers.” In these areas, teachers develop personal relationships with community members and become more deeply rooted in the community. Moreover, districts that find it difficult to attract and retain teachers may be reluctant to dismiss teachers they need to cover certain subjects.

In the final analysis, the principal in the **Steamboat** discussion asserted, the reason teachers who perform poorly are not removed from the job is that “administrators don’t bite the bullet.” Though regrettable, this reluctance to do the hard work of dismissing a sub-par teacher is understandable. A principal who came to the **Silverthorne** colloquium admitted that “it is hard—a life-changing experience—to non-renew a teacher.” However, a Fort Collins principal conceded: “I have a responsibility to the kids to ask—‘Do I need to find someone better?’”

What Is Being Done to Fix the Problem

How are Colorado school districts responding to the challenges they face in recruiting and developing teachers who will achieve and maintain a high level of quality in their work with young people? Many schools and districts across Colorado have been proactive in addressing the three challenges with unique solutions that provide promising practices to emulate.

Recruitment

- *Districts are looking to teachers trained in other states, especially those in close geographical proximity, such as Wyoming and Kansas. More than half of new teachers are trained in other states.¹ Life style and in many cases, salary, make Colorado a potential destination for out of state teachers, particularly those willing to work in hard to staff subjects or schools.*
- *Some school districts are making special efforts to recruit persons who are interested in switching careers, a strategy that has worked better when employees in high-tech businesses have found themselves unemployed that when such workers are in short supply. In 2002-2003, the Colorado Department of Education evaluated the transcripts of over 2200 candidates for eligibility to participate in alternative route*

program. Many districts are turning to this pool of potential teachers.²

- *Districts that find it hard to attract teachers, such as those in expensive resort areas and remote rural areas, are experimenting with “grow-your-own” programs. Most of these focus on paraprofessionals who already have experience in district classrooms, but some are targeting high school students who might be enticed to return to the district after college. There is powerful evidence from California and elsewhere that these programs produce teachers that are more likely to stay in the profession and communities where they are trained.*
- *Salary and other financial inducements are being used across the state. Higher salaries and signing bonuses are being offered to teachers in hard-to-staff fields like math, science, special education, and English language acquisition. Some districts are*

Additional examples of district mentor programs

- San Luis Valley has constructed mentor teams
- Douglas County school-based mentors are in every building and on full-time release
- Littleton Public Schools have half-time instructional coaches in every building
- Canon City elementary teachers are mentored by master teachers in accelerated math
- Fort Collins district is hiring retired teachers as mentors
- Colorado Springs resource teachers are on full-time release to mentor teachers who need additional help.

offering experienced teachers between five and thirty years of credit on the salary schedule to fill open positions. A few communities noted that they are building housing for teachers given the inability to afford to live in the community where teachers work (e.g., Aspen, Telluride)

Teacher Development

In the colloquia held in **Grand Junction, Silverthorne, Fort Collins, Alamosa, Colorado Springs, Pueblo, and Castle Rock**, participants discussed efforts to provide new teachers with more experienced mentors. One district has four teachers who have been trained and granted full-time release from the classroom to mentor colleagues who need help. Several districts noted sophisticated mentor training, pay mentors stipends between \$300 and \$500, and make them available to all new teachers.

Evaluation

Colorado districts are also beginning to improve their evaluation practices, although they are limited by the demands on the time of principals and experienced teachers (who could be trained to conduct evaluations). In **Silverthorne** a participant mentioned one district that offers teachers peer observation and feedback. In **Colorado Springs**, a principal reported that, in her school, there is a standards-based

rubric for improving instruction. One principal noted using the rubric in a series of 10 to 20 spot evaluations of 15 minutes for each teacher every year. Similarly, a participant in the **Wheat Ridge** meeting described his district's 17-page, eight standards-linked evaluation form with rubrics, which is used in four formal evaluations per year for each teacher.

Professional Development

Changes in professional development practices are taking root in many schools and districts across Colorado. A **Durango** participant indicated that, in her school, decisions about how to use professional development funds are made collectively by the staff. In **Grand Junction**, one participant noted that her school experiments with teachers devising their own professional development. In **Alamosa**, one district in the San Luis Valley authorized high school teachers to fashion their own curriculum (consistent with state standards) and to design professional development around that curriculum. A participant in the **Steamboat Springs** colloquium

reported that her district is moving away from the workshop model of professional development to one in which such development is embedded in the day-to-day work of teachers.

The new look of professional development

- Pueblo 60—late start (1.5 hours) per week for teacher training and retraining
- Durango—teacher-directed professional development is linked to examination of CSAP scores
- Colorado Springs—training is tailored to the needs of the individual teacher
- Steamboat Springs—professional development initiatives are evaluated based upon improved CSAP scores

What More Could and Should Be Done to Fix the Problem?

To conclude the discussion in each of the eleven colloquia, participants were asked to respond to two questions:

- *What kinds of new policies and practices should their districts and schools adopt to ensure progress toward the goal of a uniformly high level of teaching quality in their part of Colorado?* Participants were invited to consider both what they could do, provided resources were plentiful and available, and what they could do right now, in spite of the budgetary and other factors they believe constrain them.
- *What are the priorities you would set for your district, your region, and your state?* Participants were asked to consider the most important things we should be doing; on what we should be focusing; and what should take priority.

The conclusions from all eleven colloquia can be summarized in the feelings of one of the **Grand Junction** participants, “***Our priorities should be induction, mentoring, and professional development.***” This judgment was echoed in every colloquium, without exception. Meeting participants believe that the state and their districts

should emphasize induction, mentoring, and professional development over other strategies for improving teaching quality. Many noted that they believe recruitment problems, while real, pale in comparison with the challenge of retaining the high quality teachers already in their schools, particularly new teachers.

Meeting participants were not willing to wait for the state to take strides in the direction of high quality induction, mentoring, and professional development. They believe that steps can be taken without major changes in current policy. For example, districts can release experienced teachers for a semester or a year or more to work half-time or full-time at regular pay to provide mentoring. The structure of the school day and school year can be altered in order to make this happen. Collaboration between and among educator preparation programs and school districts would enhance the latter’s induction, mentoring, and professional development while generating essential information for teacher education programs concerning the needs and challenges facing the state’s public schools.

Full and accurate information about how much districts spend on induction,

mentoring, and professional development could enable principals and teachers to figure out ways to improve their efforts in these areas. That said, however, participants noted that additional funds will be required to raise the quality of induction, mentoring, and professional development to a uniformly high level throughout the state.

Teachers need more time during the school day, week, and year to plan and to problem-solve, both as individuals and together, as a staff. They need additional opportunities to prepare for classes, to consult with one another, to reflect, to discuss common problems, and to make shared decisions. Affording teachers more time and greater latitude to apply their intelligence, knowledge, and experience to the challenges facing them would go far toward improving the working conditions that teachers cite frequently as one of the most discouraging aspects of their job.

It was noted at several colloquia that ***the process of granting a Colorado license to out of state teachers should be made much easier.*** In addition, ***the number of high quality candidates coming through Colorado's own teacher education programs—including alternative route programs—should be increased, particularly in hard to staff subjects like math, science and special education.***

One strongly held view was that ***the state should cut back on the number of requirements it places on districts***

and schools, especially those that are not accompanied by funding adequate to carry out the required activity. Such “unfunded mandates” are viewed as counterproductive, diverting time and energy away from the core activity of instruction. At the very least, participants suggested, the state ought to adopt a moratorium on additional mandates; prioritize those it has already imposed; assess the impact and cost-effectiveness of existing mandates; and allow adequate time for mandates to take effect. Colloquia participants noted that regulations established by the State Board of Education should be reassessed, and those that can be waived should be eliminated. Participants in the colloquia held in rural areas were particularly concerned about the presumed inflexibility and inappropriateness of many state statutes and regulations in the special circumstances that prevail in those areas.

The issue of “tenure” needs to be resolved. Meeting participants, particularly school and district administrators, noted that state law should be changed to make it easier to dismiss teachers who perform poorly.

Finally, participants in the eleven colloquia urged policymakers to ***find a way to raise teacher salaries.*** Salaries in general, and starting salaries in particular, are viewed as too low to ensure that talented and highly motivated people enter the profession, apply for the positions Colorado districts need to fill (especially those that currently are hard to staff), and remain in teaching for many years.

In addition to what individual, local education agencies can accomplish, the state needs to move forward with wide sweeping education reform. Participants in **Akron** noted both the hopes and difficulties of such actions. “We’re our own worst enemies. We have locked ourselves in our own classrooms and have said ‘don’t bother me.’ Everyone in the world is telling us what we should be doing except us.” But at the same time they noted, that in a local control state with districts that face unique challenges and have unique needs, schools and districts need to empower themselves to address teaching quality issues. “Communities, school boards and educators need to have dialogue about ‘what is a quality

education system.’ Top-down structures are starting to make a change, but it’s forced. Unless the system changes from within, it won’t work.”

Clearly, Colorado will continue to face extensive challenges in the quest to provide a quality education for every child, every day. Coloradans are speaking out through their organizations and publications; they are demanding high quality teaching from highly qualified practitioners. ASCENDS has provided a forum for public opinion and a vehicle for reaching state and local level policymakers who have the ability and the wisdom to change the system.

Appendix. About this Report

Although preliminary registration was requested for the colloquia, in many cases, participants who had not registered attended. While coordinators made every effort to have each participant sign-in at the door, it was not always possible to do so. The statistics related below are based on an “official” number of registered participants (304). It is probable that the actual numbers exceeded that total by 10 percent to 15 percent.

A total of 304 Coloradoans participated in the colloquia, an average of 28 participants per meeting. Attendance ranged from 7 (in Steamboat Springs) to 64 (in Colorado Springs). In six of the eleven locations, attendance exceeded 25 persons. Of the 304 participants, the largest percentage (17 percent) were district-level school administrators. The next largest group (14 percent) was composed of persons who are district-level or school-level specialists. An additional 13 percent of attendees are employed, either as regular employees or as consultants, by the Colorado Department of Education. (This number includes two members of the State Board of Education.) Approximately 12 percent were teachers. Higher education was well-represented, making up 11 percent of all participants. School principals accounted for 9 percent. Individuals affiliated with a regional Board of Cooperative Services

made up 6 percent of the total, as did district superintendents. School board members constituted 4 percent of all participants. Three groups accounted for 3 percent each: parents, students, and persons who identified themselves as consultants. Of the total, 11 percent were persons who work in special education, most of whom (n=17) are employed locally at the district or school level.

It is important to bear in mind certain facts about this report and the research upon which it is based. First, the findings presented here represent the opinions of the people who participated in the eleven colloquia. The researchers have made no attempt to verify the factual accuracy of their assertions. We have done little more than record and organize the views that participants expressed. For this reason, these findings should not be treated as established, documented facts.

Second, as noted above, the findings reported here were generated through qualitative research. No quantitative instruments, such as questionnaires, were employed. As a result, a substantial degree of interpretation was necessarily involved. We have endeavored to keep our statements faithful to the substance and spirit of the originals offered by participants. But it must be accepted that different persons who

observed the meetings might legitimately come away with different interpretations of what was said.

Third, the discussions were largely unstructured and “open-ended.” They were not intended to achieve consensus or generate “common ground.” Nevertheless, several *themes* emerged and were expressed in all eleven colloquia.

Finally, the sample of 304 Coloradans is not statistically representative of the state’s population as a whole or of any sub-population. “Self-selection bias” was unavoidable because the meetings were open to anyone who cared enough about the topic to attend and participate. It is possible, therefore, that the views of a representative sample of Coloradans would differ from those expressed in the colloquia.

Notes

Part One—Introduction

1. Robert Reichardt, *Teacher Supply and Demand in Colorado* (Aurora, Colo.: Mid-Continent Research in Education and Learning, Jan. 31, 2003).
2. Reichardt.
3. Reichardt.
4. *Education Week*, “Quality Counts 2003: If I Can’t Learn from You.” January 2003.

Part Two—Findings

1. For the purposes of easy reading of this report, it was decided that a teacher would always be referred to in the female.
2. Reichardt.
3. Colorado Department of Education, Office of Professional Services.
4. Eric Hirsch, *Professional Development in Colorado: A Survey of School District Practices* (Denver, Colo.: National Conference of State Legislatures, 1999).
5. For more information, see National Staff Development Council, *NSDC Standards for Staff Development Revised* (Oxford, Ohio: NSDC, 2001).

Part Three—What Is Being Done to Fix the Problem

1. Reichardt.
2. Colorado Department of Education, Office of Professional Services.