



CHEYENNE MOUNTAIN SCHOOL DISTRICT 12

Dr. Walter C. Cooper, Superintendent of Schools

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Historically, one of the most important responsibilities of the Colorado State Board of Education and the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) has been to accredit school districts. That is, to certify that all formal requirements of academic achievement, student assessment, fiscal accountability, safety, governance, etc. have been met.

Eight years ago, a significant change was implemented regarding the process by which the State evaluated school districts in the accreditation process. For the first time, every school district in Colorado was required to enter into an “accreditation contract” with the State. The responsibility for developing these seven-year contracts rested with individual districts, so you can imagine how widely varied the contents of these contracts were among the 178 Colorado school districts.

The inconsistencies among the contracts themselves, coupled with the fact that this accreditation process was untested and new to all of us, were two of many catalysts which led the State Board and CDE to last year begin a reexamination of how the State would evaluate school districts, and a legislative effort to change the law governing school accreditation in Colorado. The result of these efforts was that laws were passed during the 2008 legislative session that allowed new criteria for evaluating school districts...laws that mandate “longitudinal achievement growth” become the “cornerstone of accreditation” in Colorado.

Using longitudinal growth (measuring improvement of academic achievement of individual students from one year to the next) is a concept new to Colorado. Over the course of the last eight years, the main measure of student performance was an assessment “snapshot” that compared, for example, last year’s fifth grade student performance to this year’s fifth grade student performance. While there may be appropriate uses for this type of measure, it was never meant to be used to judge whether a school was making appropriate progress with students. For example, this measure may indicate that a specific grade level is performing quite well, but if the majority of those students came into that grade level already performing at a high level, they could maintain very high scores, but have not really grown in terms of achievement as we would expect. Likewise, a grade level may ultimately be shown to not be performing at the level we desire, but if many of the students in that grade level began the year struggling academically, we may have made great progress with those students that does not receive the credit it deserves because it is lost in the simple “snapshot.”

It is because of this that we are excited about this summer’s roll out of the Colorado Growth Model by the Department of Education. This growth model, although limited at this point to only CSAP assessments, and the technology provided along with it, will allow all school districts in the state to now evaluate the academic growth over time for every student that takes a CSAP test. Moreover, the

model will provide assessment results and projections for individual students based on a comparison to their “academic peers.” In other words, students will no longer be compared to a simple benchmark score. Rather, where we expect them to be performing after a full year’s worth of instruction and where they are actually performing after a year’s instruction will be based on the performance of other students across Colorado that begin at exactly the same point.

While we have always been very proud of our achievement and ratings in the Cheyenne Mountain School District, it would be naive of us to think that we don’t have both very high performing students as well as underperforming students who do not make the amount of academic growth each year that we expect. Now, for the first time, the availability of a state-wide longitudinal growth measure will allow us to more clearly identify these students and adjust our program accordingly. We eagerly look forward to utilizing this tool to help us continue the academic excellence to which we have all become accustomed.

Sincerely,

Walter C. Cooper, Ed.D.
Superintendent of Schools