

B 009 05

EXECUTIVE ORDER

COLORADO EDUCATION ALIGNMENT COUNCIL

Pursuant to the authority vested in the Office of Governor of the State of Colorado, I, Bill Owens, Governor of the State of Colorado, hereby issue this Executive Order creating the Colorado Education Alignment Council.

1. Background and Need.

Over the past decade, Colorado has adopted standards that define the expected level of performance for student achievement at various levels of the K-12 education system. In addition, Colorado's higher education system has adopted guidelines regarding the expected post-secondary general education core curriculum college students should complete as well as expectations for the coursework high school students should complete to be admitted to a four-year college or university. However, the development and implementation of these various sets of standards at the K-12 and higher education levels were completed independently, at different times, and with little or no interagency coordination. In order to ensure expectations for student achievement are seamless across the K-16 continuum, I hereby determine that Colorado must align its various sets of secondary and post-secondary standards for student achievement.

To briefly review Colorado's accomplishments, in the early 1990s, the State Board of Education adopted standards concerning what every high school student should know and be able to do within various subjects. In 2003, the Colorado Commission on Higher Education established admission standards for all high school students to enter Colorado's four-year higher education institutions. These requirements outline the pre-collegiate courses that students must complete in high school in order to qualify for admission to a 4-year public college or university. In addition, the Commission adopted standards for the transferability of general education core curriculum courses at two- and four-year college and universities. These standards outline the content and skill expectations that students learn in their general education core curriculum courses in their freshman and sophomore years. The unifying theme in each of these disparate efforts is to define the expectations of student academic performance at each level of their education.

Unfortunately, strong evidence indicates that many students coming out of Colorado high schools do not meet these basic standards. According to data from the Commission on Higher Education, in the Denver Public Schools, Colorado's second largest school district, of recent graduates who enrolled into Colorado's public higher education system, 49% needed basic skills remedial coursework. However, remediation is not limited to the urban high schools. In Jefferson County, the state's largest and all suburban school district, 31% of recent high school graduates needed remedial coursework in college. At Eaglecrest High School, a suburban school located in the Cherry Cheek School District, 34% of graduates required remedial coursework.

These figures only capture those students going on to college; they do not capture those students who drop out of high school or go into the workforce. Thus, the percentage of students leaving Colorado high schools below proficiency on state standards is certainly much higher overall.

To ensure that all students leave high school prepared for their future – be it in post-secondary education or the workforce – it is important that Colorado has high standards that clearly articulate what is expected of students in high school, for high school graduation and for college admissions. It is equally important, if entering college freshman arrive having attained certain achievement levels, that the State’s higher education institutions add value to those achievement levels and ensure that all college students acquire the skills and knowledge that employers expect college graduates to have.

Therefore, Colorado needs to align its numerous secondary and post-secondary systems of standards. Doing so will ensure that teachers and faculty clearly understand the expectations Colorado citizens have for the knowledge and skills with which our state’s high school and college graduates will enter the workforce.

To align and create a system of seamless K-16 standards will require secondary and post-secondary leaders, as well as the business community, to define clearly the knowledge and skills necessary to be successful at each level of education and eventually in the workforce. Once these standards are defined, both the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and the State Board of Education may need to revamp their existing standards to reflect alignment. Finally, the new standards may require local boards of K-12 education and higher education governing boards to revise their curricula, student assessments and courses to ensure that all students attain proficiency or higher on state standards.

2. Mission.

The Council shall:

- A. Benchmark Colorado’s secondary, high school graduation, four-year college admission, and post-secondary general education core curriculum standards against national research and studies on student achievement, and determine where Colorado’s current standards exceed, fall below or do not exist vis-à-vis national best practices into K-16 standards;
- B. Define and create a set of performance standards and expectations for high school graduation. Higher education and the workforce community must outline what they expect high school diploma recipients to know and be able to demonstrate for formalized post secondary coursework or entry into the workforce;
- C. Convene as necessary experts, including secondary teachers, post-secondary faculty and employers, to define, write and establish standards for high school graduation across the State;
- D. Examine the State’s current high school standards to determine the degree of misalignment with the standards established in provision C above and make recommendations on how they may be adjusted to ensure that high school standards ensure that all students meet the graduation standards;

- E. Examine higher education's admission requirements to determine the degree of misalignment with the high school graduation standards established in provision C above and make recommendations on adjustments that will ensure graduation and college admission expectations are clear and seamless;
- F. Review Colorado's current post-secondary general education core curriculum entrance requirements and basic skills remediation standards to determine the degree to which they are aligned or not with the expectations of high school graduation and college admission standards;
- G. Establish standards for what knowledge and skills students are expected to learn as part of their post-secondary general education core curriculum requirements; these standards should clearly demonstrate what value-added above high school graduation and college admissions standards that a post-secondary general education core curriculum is providing. These standards should meet the expectations employers have for what it means to be college educated in Colorado; and,
- H. Make recommendations on how the standards for Colorado's statewide guaranteed transfer process may need to be adjusted to reflect the standards established in provision G above.
- I. Make any other recommendations related to aligning Colorado's K-12 and higher education systems, especially regarding standards, assessments and accountability structures.

3. Membership.

- A. The Commission shall be composed of no more than thirty (30) members representing the higher education and K-12 communities, the business and work force development communities, and other stakeholders in K-16 alignment. Commission members shall be appointed by the Governor and serve at the pleasure of the Governor. In the event of a vacancy, the Governor may appoint a new member to fill the vacancy.
- B. The Commission shall have three co-chairs: the Commissioner of Education, the Executive Director of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education, and a business community representative designated by the Governor.
- C. The co-chairs may appoint technical experts, secondary teachers, post-secondary faculty, employer representatives and others to sub-committees of the Commission in order to complete its work.

4. Powers and Duties

- A. The Executive Director of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education shall convene the first meeting of the Commission.

- B. Commission members shall abide by all federal and state regulations relating to the establishment of the Commission, and may promulgate Commission governance and policies as appropriate.
- C. The Commission may allow a government agency or nonprofit organization to accept gifts, grants and donations on its behalf and expend resources and hire consultants in order for it to complete its work.
- D. The Commission shall report its final recommendations to the Governor, State Board of Education, Colorado Commission on Higher Education, education committees of the Colorado General Assembly, governing boards of Colorado's public institutions of higher education, and local boards of education of Colorado's public K-12 schools, by October 1, 2006. The Commission may report interim recommendations at its discretion.

5. Directive

The Colorado Education Alignment Council is hereby created.

6. Duration

This Executive Order shall expire on October 2, 2006 unless extended by the Governor.

GIVEN under my hand and the
Executive Seal of the State of
Colorado, this 4th day of October,
2005.

Bill Owens
Governor