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News Release

CDE Releases Audit Of Test Procedures At Cesar Chavez Academy; Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones Calls For New Policies At CCA

The Colorado Department of Education today released the audit of testing procedures at Cesar Chavez Academy conducted by Caveon Test Security. (The audit report may be found at links below.)

The audit found that Cesar Chavez Academy (CCA), a K-8 Charter School in Pueblo City Schools had three successive years of extremely high rates of extra time accommodation for students from 2007 through 2009. The extra time accommodation was provided in grades three through eight and in all subjects—reading, writing, mathematics and science—tested by the Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP).

For example, 86.9 percent of fifth grade students at CCA who took the math portion of CSAP in 2008 were provided with extra time. Statewide, just 4.8 percent of fifth-graders were provided with extra time. In 2007, 77.5 percent of CCA third-grade students were provided extra time for the writing portion of CSAP. Statewide, just 6.5 percent of students were provided that accommodation.

The decision to use an accommodation for assessment is made at the local level using a process established by the Colorado Department of Education. Accommodations are designed to provide fair and standardized access to the assessment for students with specialized needs which have been documented in a formal educational plan.

The audit was requested by Commissioner of Education Dwight D. Jones based on concerns raised by former Pueblo City Schools Superintendent John Covington in June.

“The audit clearly shows that CCA had three successive years of extremely high rates of extra time accommodation for students,” said Commissioner Jones. “There is no justifiable basis for these high rates of accommodation levels. The state is compelled to require Cesar Chavez Academy to establish new policies and implement new procedures to ensure these high rates of accommodations are not repeated. CSAP testing forms the foundation of Colorado’s educational accreditation system and the accuracy, reliability and integrity of those results are paramount.”

The audit also found no evidence, however, that the extra time accommodation resulted in improved scores for Cesar Chavez Academy students, based on Caveon's analysis of the CSAP results.

The audit looked at testing procedures and practices at both Cesar Chavez Academy and Delores Huerta Preparatory Academy, a high school program that is part of the same network.

Audit findings include:

- No evidence of answer sheet tampering (through erasures), test coaching (through similar test analysis), unusual gains from prior years or unexpectedly high scores at Cesar Chavez Academy.
- Evidence of unusual allotment of extra-time accommodations at CCA.
- No evidence of any form of testing irregularity at Delores Huerta Preparatory Academy.
- If improper assistance was provided to the students while taking the test, it was done on an individual basis.
- Normal rates of extra time found in 2006 at CCA.
- Extreme rates of extra time accommodations for all grades in 2007 and 2008.
- Extreme rates of extra time accommodations during 2009, especially for grades seven and three.
- The process for granting extra time accommodation was inconsistent from 2008 to 2009.
- The process for granting the extra time accommodation was inconsistent in 2008 from process in 2009 used by other schools.

In response to the audit, Commissioner Jones requested that Cesar Chavez Academy develop and submit to the Pueblo City Schools a written plan to remedy training and implementation of testing procedures by Feb. 1, 2010. Commissioner Jones said the plan must include new CCA policies and assurances that school test procedures are transparent to the school district and to the state.

Commissioner Jones said the policies also must include detail about how accommodation decisions are reached and a mechanism for routine and periodic checking by district and/or state officials to verify that the Cesar Chavez Academy staff is following procedures.

Commissioner Jones noted that the state will review the district-approved plan and determine whether it is sufficient to make needed adjustments and provide assurances to parents, students and the public that the errors will

not be repeated. Additionally, said Commissioner Jones, "a lack of good faith efforts at CCA to comply with the development and implementation of new policies and procedures will be viewed critically."

The Colorado Department of Education also is in the process of identifying a firm that will be engaged to conduct a financial audit of the Cesar Chavez Academy. The announcement of a firm to conduct that audit is expected soon.

Caveon Audit Links:

Cover Letter:

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/CDE-CoverLetterDec52009.pdf>

Caveon Cesar Chavez Test Security (Powerpoint):

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/CDE-CaveonCesarChavezTestSecurityDec52009.ppt>

Caveon Cesar Chavez Test Security (PDF):

<http://www.cde.state.co.us/cdegen/downloads/CDE-CaveonCesarChavezTestSecurityDec52009.pdf>