

November 11, 2009

TO: Denver Area School Superintendents Council
FROM: Tony Salazar, CEA Executive Director
RE: October 23 DASSC Letter

We were disheartened to read DASSC's letter to Lt. Governor O'Brien and Commissioner Jones. It is unfortunate that DASCC is using the banner of "teacher effectiveness" to advance a political agenda that underscores a decades-old dispute. Your letter is an unnecessary diversion in the Race to the Top process that adds no value to Colorado's application.

CEA members have been involved from the outset of the process as serious participants. As such, we have consistently said that improving "teacher effectiveness" requires a systemic approach that recognizes, supports and measures a teacher's ability and growth along a continuum of preparation, licensure, recruitment, induction and professional development.

DASSC places teacher evaluation at the end of the list of points in the letter. Is this really how superintendents view the importance of an effective teacher evaluation system? We believe teacher evaluation should be a priority, not an afterthought. We should be working together to revamp teacher evaluations so they measure educators' performance and truly serve as the foundation for quality instruction.

Your letter does not mention principals. Teachers must have instructional leaders who know how to recognize effective teaching practice, provide useful feedback and encourage professional growth. Teachers are willing to be held accountable for their classroom practice and performance when evaluations are based on effective teaching methods and not on brief observations that often include no direct feedback to improve instruction.

CEA makes every effort to partner with administrators and school board members, through their professional associations, on issues that impact public education. For example, we are working collaboratively on fiscal/tax reform and the school finance adequacy lawsuit. CEA has committed time and money to this work. Your letter is a passive technique that not only weakens these partnerships, but threatens potential new federal funding for our schools.

CEA views your recommendations as a means of stripping our members of their statutory protections. Teachers are placed in difficult, vulnerable situations every day of their professional lives. Superintendents should be identifying ways to support teachers through better teaching and learning conditions, improved induction programs, meaningful professional development, increased mentoring opportunities, and of course, quality evaluation systems. We view your attempt to scapegoat teachers for public education system failures as irresponsible when so many aspects of supporting healthy instruction can and should be addressed by superintendents.

Now is not the time to create divisiveness. Now is the time to develop a shared vision on teacher effectiveness and other critical topics by having an open, honest dialogue with all public education stakeholders.

cc: Lt. Governor Barbara O'Brien
Education Commissioner Dwight Jones
Matt Gianneschi, Governor's Office
John Hefty, CASE