

## For Education Reform to Occur, We Must Actually Re-Form Education

"For Education Reform to Occur, We Must Actually Re-Form Education"



By Dwight D. Jones, Commissioner of Education

Sept. 21, 2009

When writing on the challenges facing American schools, former president at Columbia University's Teachers College Arthur Levine likened today's education system to an assembly line, putting "all students through a common process tied to the clock. Children progress based on the amount of time they spend being taught in a classroom, with all students required to master the same body of knowledge in the same period of time. Given what we know today, this approach no longer makes sense."

Reality is requiring us to face the facts. The U.S. Council on Economic Competitiveness has it just right: Innovation will be the single most important factor in determining America's success through the 21st century. Simply trying something new is no guarantee of success, but working harder at what we've always done won't get us different results. For education reform to occur, we must actually re-form education.

Few would disagree. At the same time, few are taking the time to devise a new approach, let alone act on it. The community of Westminster and the administrators and teachers of Adams School District 50 comprise those few.

In Adams 50, students progress not by the amount of time they've spent in a seat, but by their demonstration of competency in coursework. The district has defined precisely what students should know and be able to do from one level to the next in all subjects. Expectations are consistent from classroom to classroom, school to school. Teachers know exactly what to teach and what students are to learn, using a scoring guide to make sure students have "gotten it" before they move on.

Under their teacher's guidance, students track their own progress at their own pace, while receiving the time and help they need to master the content. In the elementary schools, teachers group students by performance, not age, for reading, writing and math. Middle school students are grouped similarly for language arts, math, science and social studies.

In support of Adams 50, the Colorado Department of Education is partnering with the district to implement interim benchmark assessments. As the partnership develops further, teachers will use these more frequent assessments to monitor student progress and guide their instruction. This is just one example of how business is changing at the department. CDE is convinced that more is accomplished by getting in the game and teaming with districts, instead of sitting on the sidelines keeping score.

While early results are mixed, District 50 should be commended for their efforts to reform education and involve the community in the change. "We need a standard result, not a standard process," Arthur Levine also stated. Adams 50 has taken a bold step toward that goal.

(Note-The following column was originally published by MetroNorth Newspapers on Thursday, Sept. 17.)

For more information, contact Mark Stevens, 303-866-3898, or Megan McDermott, 303-866-2334, in the CDE Office of Communications. To sign up for the CDE e-mail news service, please visit <http://www.cde.state.co.us/Communications/index.html>.