We're pleased to be in your inbox with our monthly Communication Matters newsletter, in which we highlight district successes, provide updates on relevant news, and pass along pertinent information to bolster your CASE membership.

With that said, we love hearing about innovation in your districts! Is your school or district doing something worthy of a shout-out? Be it a district-wide project, a school-specific milestone or even a staff member who goes above and beyond, we want to know! Be sure to contact CASE Communications Specialist Elisa Wiseman with your story or shout-out for a chance to be featured in a future Communication Matters. Email her at ewiseman@co-case.org.

Spotlight On: Colorado’s Finest High School of Choice

Walk through the halls of Colorado’s Finest High School of Choice on any given day, and you might hear the sounds of cowbells ringing and students cheering, along with them. That’s because as soon as a student qualifies to graduate, the staff and students, alike, make sure to celebrate them loud and proud.

The alternative education school in Englewood School District does things differently from most schools. Students call teachers and staff by their first names, and are divided into groups of 18, called “family units,” which are led by what they call a “Family teacher,” who provides both academic and social-emotional support to those who need it.

“The Family teacher is the one who is in constant contact with the student’s parent/guardian because the Family teacher’s job is to monitor progress in all classes and provide feedback,” said CFHSC principal, Dr. Bobbie Skaggs, who has been with the school in some capacity since 1995. She came on as principal about eight years ago.
Students take six-week long courses, designed to keep them motivated and engaged in their work. Instead of credits or grades, students earn points for their work. 160 points represent one academic credit, Skaggs said. It takes 3,280 points to graduate, and students count down to zero; when they no longer have points to earn, it’s celebration time. With students graduating on that rolling basis, the school accepts new students every six weeks.

While college isn’t always a student’s first choice, one of the requirements for graduation is to apply to one school.

“All of our students have to apply for a college in order to graduate,” Skaggs said. “They will often get that letter of acceptance, and think, ‘huh…. maybe this is for me.’ Not all of our students go to college right away, but it opens that door.”

The new building where Finest is housed was designed to be open and inviting, Skaggs said. Founded in 1980, much of the foundational pieces of CFHSC are the same. No homework is required—in fact, homework is considered a privilege that students can earn over time—and the focus is on student choice.

“[One student] recently told me that the difference with Finest is that, when you come here, teachers ask you what you want to do. It’s not about the teacher telling me what I need to do and how I need to do it. They ask, ‘Who are you? These are the requirements; how do you want to fulfill them?’ Skaggs said.

The biggest changes at Finest came in 2014, when they moved to a state-of-the-art facility and changed their name from Colorado’s Finest Alternative High School.

“It really was about trying to harness that choice idea,” she said. “There’s a lot of choices when you come into our school.”

But the name change was two-fold, she added, because of some of the stigma that comes with the “alternative” label.
“Our biggest challenge is overcoming this idea that alternative education is less-than, in some way, or that it is not as high quality as traditional education. That is something we fight tooth and nail all the time,” Skaggs said.

After 23 years at Finest, she’s used to the fight. In fact, students take pride in it, she said, and embrace the label, with hopes that someday people won’t see it with a grain of salt. Until then, though, they’re not backing down from the criticism.

"It’s a constant battle, but we’re up for it. We got this,” she said. “Bring it on.”

Register Now for the CASE Winter Leadership Conference, *Excellence by Association*!

We’re excited to share that registration is now open for the 2019 CASE Winter Leadership Conference in Westminster, Colorado! This year is promising to be another great professional learning opportunity with timely breakout sessions, enriching networking events, and keynote speaker, Gretchen Rubin, *New York Times* bestselling author of *The Happiness Project*.

Early bird registration ends November 15, 2018, so make sure you register today to take advantage of these discounted prices! [Click here for more information about this year’s conference.](#) We look forward to seeing you in Westminster!

Updates on Amendment 73
The Yes on Amendment 73 campaign is still running with full-force until Election Day, which is right around the corner. As we continue supporting the campaign’s efforts, we will keep CASE members in the loop with relevant updates and information.
The campaign got one of its biggest endorsements yet on Wednesday evening, by Senator Bernie Sanders at a CSU rally in support of the Democratic nominee for governor, Rep. Jared Polis. Sanders announced his endorsement with a strong decry of the over 100 districts who have been forced to move to four-day school weeks:

“Here we are, the wealthiest nation in the world, here we are as people who understand we will not succeed unless we have the best educated nation on Earth … and somehow we do not have enough money today to provide education to kids in Colorado for five days a week?” Sanders said, cheers drowning out part of his remarks. “We don’t have enough money to pay teachers a living and decent wage?” Click here to read more.

In your efforts to share public support of the campaign on social media, make sure you share this great video clip to engage your social networks. Don’t forget to also keep a close eye on the campaign’s digital toolkit for more sample newsletter blurbs and social media posts. This toolkit is constantly evolving with new information and resources, including a list of top-performing Facebook posts to share.

Finally, ballots dropped in mailboxes last week! Make sure you vote by the November 6, 7:00 PM deadline. In case you missed the CASE Election Special newsletter last week, you may want to review these resources to stay informed about this particularly crowded 2018 ballot.

Colorado Public Radio 2018 Election Guide
Ballot Information Booklet (also known as the “Blue Book”)

National Council on Teacher Quality Teacher Evaluation Analysis
A few weeks ago, EdWeek shared the results of an analysis by a Washington-based think tank of six different teacher-evaluation systems, including one in Denver. According to their results, “In Denver, most teachers who received evaluation ratings in the 2016-17 school year either the same rating the following year or improved by one category (although NCTQ cautions that score inflation could have caused these increases). More than 90 percent of the district’s highest-rated teachers stayed in their jobs.” Read more about the study here.

Finland Trip Opportunity with EF Educational Tours
In partnership with CASE, EF Educational Tours is offering CASSA and CASSP a great opportunity with the 2019 EF Professional Learning Study Travel Scholarship to Finland and Estonia.

Three full scholarships will be awarded for travel, on July 6-12, 2019. Applications will be evaluated based on applicants’ commitment to global education initiatives in Colorado.
Applications must be received by Wednesday, October 31, 2018 to be considered. Finalists will be asked to complete an in-person interview by Friday, December 14, 2018 and recipients will be notified by Friday, December 21, 2018.

Click here to download a PDF with more information about this great opportunity, and here to access the online application. Please email us at case@co-case.org with any questions.

Demont Award Applications are Due October 31, 2018

Nominations for the 2018 Demont Award are due next week! The Demont Award is a program established by Representative Jim Wilson in 2002 as a way to recognize those administrators who have made a significant impact on their school districts of 1,500 or fewer students.

Demont Award Recipients have been recognized for demonstrating exceptional leadership in Colorado's rural and small schools. Their high moral character, compassion for children and positive contributions to education have set an example for administrators throughout the state. An unwavering dedication to the success of their students and school districts has resulted in being commended for “Leaving it Better Than They Found It.”

Any administrator is eligible to be recommended for the award. If you would like to recommend an administrator, please contact Rep. Jim Wilson for a packet. The contact information to request an application packet is:

Email: therunningw@bresnan.net
Phone: 719-221-8383

In The News

- Amendment 73: Understanding the tax increase for education on your Colorado ballot (Chalkbeat Colorado)
- Colorado school districts seek voter support for school safety and mental health resources (Chalkbeat Colorado)
- Closure is still an option, but a new approach will let struggling Denver schools make their case (Denver Post)
- Lots (and lots) of Teachers Are Running For Office This Year. Here's Why. (Video) (EdWeek)
- Tax Hikes to Fund Schools? Once Taboo, the Idea is Gaining Momentum (EdWeek)