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# Colorado School Accountability Reports

## *Resource Guide*



Colorado School Public Relations Association  
Colorado Association of School Boards  
Colorado Association of School Executives



## What this resource guide can do for you...

When the Colorado School Accountability Reports are published, they will likely prompt many questions from parents, community members and the media. This resource guide provides an overview of how you can prepare your staff and community for the release of these reports, formerly known as school report cards. Schools and districts need to have consistent messages that are proactive, positive, honest and tell a more complete story than what a state report can reasonably do, especially in its first year.

This guide — assembled with the input of school public relations experts from around the state — is also designed to help you communicate to your community about student achievement for years to come. Resource materials from Colorado school districts and organizations are included to assist you in this essential task.

This guide is a joint effort of the Colorado School Public Relations Association (COSPRO), the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) and the Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE). These long-standing organizations hope that this package will provide you with some of the tools necessary to build a solid and effective communication plan to follow before, during and after the state reports are released.

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**Please keep in mind that this guidebook is designed to help you with the School Accountability Reports. However, Colorado school districts are also required to produce and distribute two other accountability-related reports.**

By October 1<sup>st</sup> each year, the district is required to report to the public the district's goals/objectives and the district's plan to improve educational achievement, maximize graduation rates and increase the ratings for each school's accreditation category. The report is developed after consultations with the district accountability committee and after compilation of the goals/objectives and plans submitted by each school-level accountability committee.

By December 1<sup>st</sup> each year, the district must disseminate a written report to the taxpayers and local community regarding progress on district and school accreditation indicators. The report is made available to the State Board of Education, the general assembly, the governor and the public at large. The accreditation report must address the specific areas outlined in State Board of Education rules (1 CCR 301-1, Rules 2202-R.0.00) adopted June 20, 2001.

The district should decide whether it makes sense to include the October 1<sup>st</sup> goals/objectives/plans report or the December 1<sup>st</sup> accreditation report as supplements to the School Accountability Reports. The pros and cons of including either or both should be weighed carefully. There may be some benefit to making an annual comprehensive report to parents and community members. However, there may also be good reasons, practical and strategic, to support producing and disseminating the reports separately.

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Community Engagement – Sample Facilitator Script

Communications/10 Keys for promoting your school report card results

Get your message out through Key Communicators

Talking points: School Accountability Reports

Questions & Answers about Colorado School Accountability Reports, a.k.a. Report Cards

Key Questions to consider when designing your school or district report card

Developing your district: Your school report card

Trinidad Junior High School (not available online)

Centennial School District (not available online)

Mesa County Valley School District 51 (not available online)

Force Escuela Primaria (not available online)

Lake Middle School (not available online)

Estes Park High School (not available online)

Policy Information

Accountability Process Timeline

Colorado School District Websites Posting Accountability Data, Survey Tools or Report Card Information

## What is the Colorado School Accountability Report?

In September 2001, the state will publish Colorado School Accountability Reports (formerly referred to as report cards) for every public school in Colorado. Individual school academic performance ratings based on CSAP scores will be included in the reports. Each school's academic performance rating will be compared to ratings of the 10 geographically closest schools in the area.

Issued by the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado School Accountability Reports will also include information about: performance on the state assessments; safety and school environment; discipline; student attendance and time spent in classrooms; staff; and district revenue and expenditures.

### Information to be reported

The following categories will be included in the Colorado School Accountability Reports:

- **School rating for overall academic performance**

Based on CSAP scores, the state will assign the following performance ratings to individual schools: excellent, high, average, low and unsatisfactory. The Spanish version test scores will be counted toward a school's academic performance grade. In the second year of accountability reports, ACT scores will be factored into school ratings.

For the first year, schools will be rated on a curve. Based on the formula for determining the curve, only three in 10 Colorado schools will be excellent or high; the rest will be average or below. The top eight percent of Colorado schools will be excellent; 25 percent of schools will be high; 40 percent of schools will be average; 25 percent will be low; and the bottom 2 percent will be unsatisfactory.

In the first year, "excellent" schools will be awarded funds known as the John Irwin Schools of Excellence Awards.

If a school earns an "unsatisfactory" performance rating, the local school board must submit a school improvement plan to the State Board of Education. If no plan is submitted, the State Board may recommend that the school become an independent charter school.

- **School improvement rating**

In the second year of Colorado School Accountability Reports, when schools will have a new set of CSAP scores, the state will include two ratings on the reports – one for performance and another for improvement. The following academic improvement ratings will be added: significant improvement, improvement, stable, decline, or significant decline.

From 2001-2005, two-thirds of the funds from the John Irwin Awards will be distributed to "low" or "unsatisfactory" schools that received a "significant improvement" rating and to schools in the top eight percent of improvement.

- **Safety and school environment**

- Safe and orderly school features

- Safety and discipline (Substance abuse will include three categories: drugs, alcohol and tobacco.)

- Student attendance, time spent in classroom and dropout rate (Information on a student enrollment stability rate and free lunch statistics also will be included in the report.)

- Student information over time

- **Student performance**

- CSAP scores by grade level (Pie charts on the report will include a category for “no scores.”)

- History of school CSAP scores

- **Taxpayers’ report**

- Sources of district revenue

- District use of funds

- District debt, capital construction and equipment

- Voter approved funding changes

- **School Staff**

- School employment

- Student/teacher ratio

- Professional experience of teachers

- Average salaries

If data is not reported to the state by a district, the report will indicate that no data was reported.

A sample of the Colorado School Accountability Report can be accessed at [www.state.co.us/schools/index.html](http://www.state.co.us/schools/index.html).

## **How will Colorado School Accountability Reports be distributed to parents?**

According to law, the State of Colorado will print the reports and distribute copies to schools by September 15, 2001. Individual schools must make their Colorado School Accountability Report available to parents within a reasonable time of receiving the report from the state.

## **How can schools and districts respond to Colorado School Accountability Reports?**

When these reports are published, they will likely prompt many questions from parents, community members and the media. The best way to respond is to be prepared with consistent messages that tell a complete story about your school or district.

## **Can we include additional information in our Accountability Report?**

We encourage schools to supplement the state accountability report with materials that address local indicators of success, including:

- Current student performance results related to district academic standards.
- A summary of implementation and results of the school improvement plan.
- Dropout and school completion rates.
- At the secondary level, the number or percentage of the school's total student populations completing "advanced" courses, percentage of students taking college aptitude examinations and their scores, and percentage of graduates entering post-secondary education (where applicable).
- Conduct and disciplinary actions taken during the school year, including the number of students suspended and/or expelled.
- Community satisfaction with student achievement and the learning environment.
- Accomplishments of the school related to its mission, goals and objectives.
- Information from the school accountability committee about its accomplishments.
- Any other information that helps provide parents and community members with a comprehensive view of the school's challenges and achievements.

***(Note: While schools can supplement the reports with their own additional information, they cannot refute the state's report.)***

## **Preparing for the Colorado School Accountability Report Release**

This section provides information to help districts be proactive in how they prepare for the release of the Colorado School Accountability Reports.

### **Planning your efforts**

School Accountability Reports provide an excellent opportunity to focus the attention of your community on student achievement. However, they only tell a part of the story, and are therefore not enough to truly inform the public about the quality of public education that children receive. In order to maximize the effectiveness of the Accountability Reports, it is critical that they be part of an overall communications strategy.

The outline in the Resources section of this guide suggests the basic elements of a communications plan that can be used to facilitate the development and enhance the effectiveness of the Accountability Report. The plan can also be used year-round as a guide for communicating about student achievement. The basic elements of a communications plan include: gathering research/information, identifying key audiences, developing messages, developing communication strategies, and evaluating your efforts.

After your plan is developed, prepare a timeline of activities and assign someone to be responsible for the types of communications that will make a difference in public understanding and perception of school quality.

Educating parents, teachers, the media and other community leaders about the Colorado School Accountability Reports before they are distributed will ensure that key groups have a better understanding of the information. Through media relations, community relations and stakeholder communications, you can lay the foundation for an open dialogue between the schools, the school district and the public.

### **Gathering research and information**

As districts prepare for the onslaught of inquiries from various local and state media, as well as questions from local stakeholders, it is important to know how your own community feels about your schools. You will also want to know what criteria they use to determine school quality. It will likely include a number of things, some of which may not be included in the Accountability Report. Having this information allows you to target your messages about the bigger picture of student achievement to your audiences.

You should consider research instruments such as focus groups, surveys and interviews to help you zero in on the right message.

You may also gain useful information at no cost by looking at research completed by other school districts or statewide and national research. For example, a summary of

national research on what people expect from schools conducted by KSA-Plus Communications (formerly A-Plus) can be found at:  
[www.ksagroup.com/ksa/resourcepop6/html](http://www.ksagroup.com/ksa/resourcepop6/html).

## What method should you use?

The research method will depend on your audience and resources. Here are some examples:

1. **Survey** – You may want to conduct a mail, telephone, or web-based survey to efficiently assess the attitudes and opinions of a large number of stakeholders (e.g., parents, district/school staff).

### Tips for conducting a survey:

- Keep the survey simple and easy.
- Carefully select the survey respondents (or a sample). Though you cannot contact every member of your audience or population (e.g., all parents), you do want to represent everyone equally. Use a random sample where every member of your population has an equal chance of being selected for your study.
- Include demographic questions (such as gender, ethnicity, school, and grade level) so you can compare how well your survey respondents represent your audience.
- Write short and clear questions.
- Ask questions that directly relate to student achievement, school quality and the Colorado School Accountability Report. Do not add unnecessary questions to the survey.
- Pre-test your questions. Find some “guinea pigs” for a trial run of the survey. Pre-testing the survey helps identify confusing directions and problematic questions.

2. **Focus Group** – Typically, a focus group offers an opportunity to hold a facilitated discussion with six to 10 members of an identified audience. This type of research offers in-depth feedback from a small group.

### Tips for conducting focus groups:

- Carefully prepare for the discussion – Prior to moderating the group, write a guide specifically outlining all topics to be covered during the session.
- Limit the discussion – Cover topics that directly relate to student achievement, school quality or the Colorado School Accountability Report.
- Start general and end with specifics – In other words, start out by asking general questions, such as what is the participants’ overall awareness of Colorado

School Accountability Reports or what they think makes a quality school. After each participant has provided feedback on general attitudes, proceed to more specific questions, such as the level of awareness of each of the key elements of the Accountability Report.

- Select participants who represent the diversity of your community.
- Set ground rules – Outline common expectations for the group (e.g., honesty, confidentiality, and respect for others).
- Allow everyone to speak – Do not let one or two individuals dominate the discussion.
- Probe responses – Make sure you clearly understand the intention and meaning of each comment; request examples and ask for more details from group members when needed.

**3. Stakeholder Meeting** – Use existing stakeholder meetings, such as scheduled staff meetings, civic group meetings and parent group meetings to discuss the Accountability Report. Because these meetings typically include self-selected participants, do not assume feedback from these meetings represents the opinions of all audience members. Various methods can be used for this venue:

- Distribute a short postcard survey at the meeting.
- Use an electronic keypad survey response system can be used during the meeting. A system can be rented if the district does not own this equipment.
- Break out small, facilitated discussion groups from the larger meeting.
- An open forum to pose questions to the group and collect general comments.

**4. Personal Interview** – Conduct personal interviews with key members of identified audiences (e.g., the media).

**Tips for conducting the interview:**

- Prepare a list of questions to cover.
- Ask the same questions of each participant so that comparisons can be made among interviews.
- Take detailed notes during the conversation. Write down verbatim comments whenever possible rather than paraphrasing general ideas.

## **Engaging your community**

Improving student achievement depends upon more than just the efforts of the schools. Therefore, it is important to engage your community in a dialogue about student achievement. Can you come to any agreement on what students need to know and be able to do? What are some agreed-upon characteristics of a good school? Providing opportunities for dialogue may help you gather helpful information and create a broader understanding of student achievement in your schools.

One way to engage your community is to host study circles – or small group discussions with key audiences such as parents, school improvement committees, booster clubs, key business leaders, etc. You may wish to employ an outside facilitator or have members of the school board facilitate the discussions. A script for a school board facilitated session is included in the Resources section of this guide.

Before starting out, be sure to set some common expectations, and remind participants that the facilitator is indeed a neutral party. The facilitator should encourage participants to set ground rules and keep to them. The facilitator should also help members grapple with content by asking probing questions while creating opportunities for everyone to participate. Following are some examples of questions to ask during a study circle session.

## **Dialogue Sessions with parents and community**

- Think of the school in your district closest to your home. What criteria would members of this school community use to determine its quality? (Record all of the responses they might have for their satisfaction with the school.)
  - If the community were asked to grade the school, predict the grade they would give. Why?
  - What was school like for you?
  - How is school different today?
  - What skills do today's students need in order to be successful?
  - How do we know when a student is educated?
  - Describe a good school.
- How do you define achievement?
  - What "good school" characteristics does our school/district have?
  - You can also use dialogue sessions to go over the Accountability Report and to answer questions that community members may have.
  - Dialogue Sessions with staff.
  - Tell me something great about your school.

- Who are our customers? How do we communicate with them? What do we say that tells the true story of our school?
- As a school, how can we provide a greater context for understanding the School Accountability Reports?
- What three things will you do right away to prepare for the School Accountability Report release?

When reports are released, you should also consider using study circles with key groups to discuss your results and next steps.

## **Identifying key audiences**

Communicating with community stakeholders is not just a good idea—it's imperative. Schools/districts that have a solid communications plan, as well as those who have had very little contact with their public, face a communications challenge with the Colorado School Accountability Reports.

Because you cannot reach everyone in your community, one of the challenges of communicating effectively is to identify your key stakeholder groups. These groups have a natural interest in the schools. They also include opinion leaders; those on the staff or in the community who will help you spread the word.

### **Examples of key audiences include:**

- district/school staff
- parents
- media
- business leaders
- civic organizations
- educational groups
- public officials

## **Developing messages**

After you have identified your key stakeholder groups—or target audiences—spend some time thinking about what you want to communicate to them. Then you are ready to develop messages.

Effective message development depends upon the research you did at the beginning of the communication process. You take what you want to say and tailor it so that it meets the needs of the stakeholder group with which you are trying to communicate. For example, if your parent community says school safety is a priority in judging school quality, focus your messages on actions you have taken to make your schools safe havens. If the business community judges your schools primarily on test results, focus your messages on test results.

**In addition, the most effective messages are:**

- concise and clear
- honest and straightforward
- free of educational jargon
- presented in human terms, often using a story or example

## **Communicating with your staff and public**

Districts and schools that use a variety of strategies for communicating with staff and the public will be the most successful in presenting positive messages regarding the School Accountability Report.

## **Developing communication strategies**

In developing communication strategies, keep in mind the following communication principles:

- Internal audiences—staff and active parents—should be your first priority. These groups will help you extend your reach into the broader community.
- Two-way communication is most effective. Therefore, you need strategies that help you get your message out, as well as those to help you hear from your stakeholders. This allows you to continually refine messages and anticipate issues.
- Strategies should provide personal experience. Do not rely solely on the written word. The most effective communication is usually the kind that allows people to see for themselves what you are trying to communicate. Examples include “take the test” opportunities, principal for a day programs, tours of schools, etc.

## **Staff: Your best ambassadors**

Your staff is your most important stakeholder group. If they do not understand and reinforce the messages you are presenting to the public, it is unlikely that your communications will be believed.

The first step is to help your staff understand and recognize the Accountability Reports as only one picture of what happens at your school/district. There are many programs and school characteristics not covered by the reports that they can be proud of, and it will help others understand what you do every day: educate youth to achieve high academic standards. Many of these programs and characteristics will have been identified in your research or in your community engagement sessions.

Conduct a series of training opportunities for your staff. Make sure they understand all of the components of the School Accountability Report and what they mean. They may also benefit from some training on communications techniques. Don't forget that classified staff is just as important to the communication process as the teaching staff.

Continue to communicate with staff through meetings, flyers in paycheck envelopes, notices on bulletin boards, articles in your employee newsletter, e-mail and other means of communication. If necessary, discuss only one aspect of what your schools do per newsletter. Make your communication pieces simple and visually appealing so they are easy to understand and remember.

## **Parents: Let them help**

Another key stakeholder group is your active parents. Take your cues from parents who have expressed their opinions in your surveys, focus groups or engagement sessions, and then invite these parents to help plan your Accountability Report communication process.

If you have an existing parent advisory committee, ask what they would like to know, what kind of communication tools work best, and how they would like to receive the information (Friday folders, letters, newsletter, etc.).

If you don't have an advisory group, consider forming one — just to guide you as you communicate about student achievement.

## **Extending your reach to key communicators**

If your district has developed a key communicators network, now is the time to activate this group. Key communicators are individuals in your community who are influential when talking about school issues. They may include representatives of such groups as a homeowner's association, Chamber of Commerce, real estate association, the local fire department, academics, civic and service clubs, churches, local AARP or League of Women Voters. Listening to these groups and providing them with information from the school district's point of view can go a long way toward improving credibility and trust. The result will be better communication and interpretation of your CSAP scores and Accountability Reports to your community and to those who live outside the community. More information on key communicators is included in the Resources section of this guide.

## **Delivering your message to key audiences**

Develop action plans for each audience you wish to reach, for example:

### **District/School Personnel:**

- Adopt a policy of ongoing, two-way communications with district/school personnel at all levels.
- Provide regular opportunities to give and receive information.
- Keep employees informed about what's going on by providing information in paycheck envelopes, newsletters, and on bulletin boards and posters.
- Review your current orientation procedures for new staff and make sure information on student achievement is up to date.
- Train staff in communications techniques so they can help communicate positive messages about your schools. The Colorado Education Association's "Ambassadors" program is a good communications workshop for teachers. Check with your local association representative to find out more about this workshop.

- Make sure your teaching staff is well versed in all of the elements of the Colorado School Accountability Report and can explain what they mean (without using jargon) to parents. A good time to review reports would be during the opening of school activities or at the first student-teacher conference of the year.

**Parents:**

- Adopt a policy of communicating effectively with parents.
- Establish opportunities that provide continuous parent involvement, such as advisory groups, open forums, formal and informal surveys, focus groups, etc.
- Develop a new parent welcome packet that includes specific information about student achievement in your district/school.
- Make sure your district and schools report on relevant information in a “parent-friendly” (i.e., easy to read and understand) manner.
- Take advantage of your existing communications with parents (i.e., report cards and Friday folders) by providing additional information that will enhance parents’ knowledge of your school and its progress on state standards and student achievement.
- Develop a program that offers CSAP test taking tips or provides advice to parents on how to help students prepare for the CSAP test.
- Host a Take the Test Day at your school to let parents experience a sample version of the CSAP test.
- Present information on the Colorado School Accountability Report at the beginning-of-the-year parent group meetings.

**Media:**

- Adopt a policy of open, honest, ongoing communications with the media.
- Get to know your local media representatives such as editors, publishers and reporters during non-crisis or non-event times. Provide background information on your district/school that includes experts on different subjects.
- Become your local media’s School Accountability Report expert. Meet with your newspaper’s editorial board before the September report release to review your expected results.
- Provide newsworthy press releases.
- Develop and promote special programs in the community that lend themselves to favorable media attention.
- Write a weekly, monthly or quarterly column about various items included on the School Accountability Report, including what your district/school is doing to improve student achievement and CSAP test scores.

- Always acknowledge a reporter's good work. Likewise, if a story carries incorrect information, follow up with a polite, but factual correction.

### **Business/Civic/Service/Educational Groups:**

- Provide articles of interest for inclusion in the newsletters of business, civic, service and other educational groups.
- Provide community groups an opportunity to learn more about the ways in which your district/school works continually for the improvement of school achievement. Host an open house or special meeting to share elements of your math, science, reading and writing curricula, demonstrating how the curricula meets state standards and prepares students for the future.

### **Public Officials:**

- Get to know your public officials and their staff. Arrange meetings during non-event times to provide them information about your schools beyond what the Accountability Report contains.
- Provide consistent, honest, direct and timely information. Become the resource for all matters relating to items included in the State Accountability Report including student achievement. Don't wait for them to call. You call them.
- Host a Take the Test Day to let community leaders and public officials experience a sample version of the CSAP test.

## **What to do if your school rates “unsatisfactory”**

If you predict a low rating for your school, it is critical that you begin preparing your community stakeholders — parents, community and the media — *before* the Accountability Report release. Let them know what you expect, why the rating is low, and steps you will take to improve student performance.

If parents and community members are concerned about your school’s performance, provide many avenues for them to learn more. Invite them to:

- Visit teachers or members of the School Accountability Advisory Committee and ask to see the school’s action plan.
- Look at reports on some of the district tests or other forms of assessment.
- Review the school’s improvement plan or the district’s annual report to find other performance indicators.
- Participate in study circles to discuss the Accountability Report and student achievement in your district/school.
- Visit your school to see for themselves what is offered and to obtain a first-hand sense of the school environment.
- Get involved with your school to make a positive difference.

Don’t sit back and react to the public’s perception of your Accountability Report. Educate stakeholders early and they will be more likely to work with you in raising student achievement.

## **Word of caution: Don’t make excuses!**

While making your explanations, don’t make them sound like excuses. Acknowledge your weaknesses, provide the variables and let your community know specifically how you are addressing the deficiencies. Then provide a follow-up report on your interventions.

## **Communication: 20+ Bright Ideas**

Here are more than 20 bright ideas you can use to present the State Accountability Report to your community.

1. Create your own “School Accountability Report” before the state sends out its edition. District samples are included in the Resources section of this guide.
2. Conduct a district news conference immediately following the state release of Colorado School Accountability Reports.
3. Conduct a news conference at the school, using students and site council members to present school information. Be sure these people are adequately prepared. A dress rehearsal to providing information to journalism students will also help you prepare and involve students.
4. Create local school district speakers’ bureau using parents, site council members, students, teachers, retired school employees, senior citizens, business leaders and community leaders. Have speakers available to present at local community groups such as Rotary Club, Chamber of Commerce meetings, church groups, Lions Club, Kiwanis Club, local radio talk shows, real estate agents, Federated Women’s Clubs, service organizations, senior citizen organizations and centers, etc.
5. Create a School Accountability Report “presenter’s kit.” Include some talking points about the report’s information. Some sample talking points are included in the Resources section of this report. Include a general fact sheet with highlights of the information for speakers to take with them. Also include overhead slides to be used in the presentations.
6. Create a program insert about your report and school improvement progress and use it at school athletic events, music concerts and drama productions.
7. Create a banner or poster of brief information regarding school progress and post it at the concession stands or ticket offices to be showcased during home athletic games or events. Choose a different school improvement topic for each home game.
8. Use half time at the games to conduct a “trivia question” contest regarding your school’s progress.
9. Create a traveling display of student work and statistics from your Accountability Report. Encourage local banks, malls and businesses to host the display.
10. Talk to utility companies about including School Accountability Report card information as bill or paycheck stuffers.
11. Present Accountability Report information to local school site councils, with an update of their school improvement plans to illustrate the impact of the improvement plan. Explain and discuss the results.
12. Advertise your report information on your school building marquee. This is an inexpensive way to communicate brief statements and facts to your local school community. (This reaches more community members than just the parents of your students.)

13. Challenge student leadership organizations to find ways to inform their community about their school's progress.
14. Invite media to your school to showcase specific programs that have contributed to a boost in local academic achievements.
15. Provide one-page summaries to local real estate offices, dentist offices, doctor offices, barbers, hair salons, chambers of commerce and banks. Create a display unit, which draws readers' attention and holds the brochures neatly.
16. Hand out a one-page summary for parents to read as they wait in their cars for their elementary school children after school.
17. Create a list of places where people wait in line (DMV, grocery stores, etc.). Distributing your information to these places often will reach parents and community members who tend not to be active in school events.
18. Have your high school students (art class, media class, video technology class, etc.) create posters, videos or other visuals of school improvement information for display on church bulletin boards, in restaurants, employees' lounges, break rooms, cafeterias and building entrances.
19. At your school's back-to-school night, have students explain how they are learning concepts targeted in the school improvement plan. For example, have students explain how they are learning algebraic concepts and have a community member from the site council talk about how those skills are used in the work place.
20. Ask shopping centers about using empty storefronts to display student work and illustrations of school progress. To answer questions, have volunteers host displays on weekends and/or evenings. Produce a video to explain your school's progress, and play it continuously throughout the day for shoppers.
21. Capitalize on students' achievements such as the time when your school honor roll is released. Provide information to media for a feature on your school improvement program.
22. Meet personally with key stakeholder groups (i.e. school improvement committees, parent-teacher organizations, etc.) to go over your school's Accountability Report results as soon as the reports are released.

## **Working with the media**

An important function of public relations is getting your message out accurately and putting your best foot forward. However, when working with the media, don't expect them to be your school or district's public relations agent. While a positive story is always preferable, the most you should expect from the media is accuracy and fairness. When you take stock in this philosophy, your relationship with the media will become much less stressful.

When working with the media, it is essential that your key messages be told in brief "sound bytes." The eight-second sound byte has become the standard for politicians communicating through the national electronic media. Even for local television and

radio stations, it is extremely rare when a sound byte over 30 seconds is used. If you're dealing with print media, this is not as crucial, but you still want to be concise and revisit the key message several times throughout a news conference or interview.

### **Building media relationships**

One of the fundamentals of media relations is building a relationship with reporters. This isn't done overnight and needs to be nurtured over time. Don't expect good results from the media if you don't feel you can trust them or they don't feel they can trust you. This kind of relationship takes time and effort, but it is worth it in the long run.

On first contact or early in the relationship, make an appointment on their turf. Talk about what you can do to help the reporter/editor get information. Periodically (perhaps once a year), gather the media as a group for lunch to have a question/answer period. This could be associated with a briefing on a significant issue in the district, such as the School Accountability Report release. These sessions provide a good opportunity to air issues on both sides.

Regular contact by phone is important. At least once a month (once a week would be ideal), call your regular beat reporters or others that cover your school or district. Give them a story idea or just ask them if they have any questions about anything. These may be very brief calls, but it's good to stay in touch. At television stations, the assignment editor is a good contact because they usually determine what will get covered that day or week.

You may want to consider holding a news conference to make your Accountability Reports public when the state releases them. A dry-run news conference is a good way to practice if you decide to schedule the real thing. You should practice your presentation, especially if it involves site council members or students. Have someone ask you questions and see how you answer. A news conference with high school journalism students should provide a warm-up for the real thing and would provide opportunity for the students to write stories for their school publications.

### **Assure the media understands what the reports mean**

Don't just assume that the media in your community will understand the meaning of all of the items contained in the Colorado School Accountability Report. You should certainly not assume that they understand the big picture of student achievement in your school/district. Use the impending release of the Accountability Report as an opportunity to meet with reporters/editors and answer any questions that they may have. At this time, be prepared with examples, stories and statistics that present the whole story of student achievement in your school/district.

## **Tips for working with the media**

### **Do**

- Know what information is public record and what is confidential.
- Know the school district's policies and procedures.
- Have a good attitude, and develop mutual respect.
- Be factual, accurate and to the point.
- Listen before you talk. Make sure you understand where the reporter is going with the questions before you answer them.
- Ask for more time if you need it.
- Ask the reporter what the story is about.
- Consider the legal and public relations implications of what you say.
- Protect students' rights.
- Call a reporter back.
- Explain issues and clarify misconceptions.
- Respect deadlines.

### **Don't**

- Give personal opinions.
- Go off the record.
- Answer a question if you're unsure.
- Be afraid to say, "I don't know."
- Lie, cover up or mislead.
- Say anything you don't want to see in print or broadcast.
- Be defensive or sarcastic.
- Single out any one media contact for praise or ridicule.
- Talk before you have all the information.
- Let the reporter pressure you into talking about something that's uncomfortable.
- Debate with the reporter.
- Let inaccurate facts go uncorrected.
- Say "no comment." Other options are:
  - "I can't answer that questions; it's still under investigations."
  - "I don't know; I'll get back to you."

“It would be inappropriate to comment since the matter is still under investigation (or in litigation).”

“We have no further details at this time.”

“That information is confidential under policy/law.”

“I cannot predict the results of this case.”

“I wouldn’t want to speculate on that.”

## **Don’t avoid the media**

Be honest, open and accessible. Provide as much information as you can about an issue when the media ask. If they can’t get it from you, they’ll get it from somebody else who may not tell it like you’d like it told. If you give them a “no comment” about a controversial issue, they may not be eager to come out for your good news story in the future.

## **Following up after the release**

Your communication plan does not include when the Colorado School Accountability Reports are released and your key messages have been communicated. You still need to assess how well you achieved the goals of your communications plan so that you may continue to communicate about student achievement. What impact did your key messages have on identified audiences?

You will need to conduct research to assess the effectiveness of your communication to district stakeholders about the Colorado School Accountability Reports.

## **Evaluating your communication efforts**

### **Why is follow-up research important?**

A follow-up assessment of your communication plan for the Colorado State Accountability Report is essential. It is important that you created a research plan that fits your district’s budget and resources, regardless of the limitations.

This research can:

- Evaluate the success of your efforts to communicate key messages
- Help identify messages that still need to be communicated
- Provide insight on ways to improve future efforts and communication plans

### **Who do you talk to?**

- They key audiences you identified in your communication plan. These audiences may include district/school staff, parents, media, business leaders, civic organizations, educational groups and public officials.

## What questions do you ask?

- Review the goals of your communication plan, and ask questions that assess those objectives.
- Here is an example:

**Goal** – Make audiences aware of what the district is doing to improve student achievement and CSAP test scores.

**Survey Assessment** – “I am aware of steps the district is taking to improve student achievement and CSAP scores.” (Responses range from “strongly agree” to “strongly disagree”).

## What method do you use?

The research method will depend on your audience and resources. You may want to repeat the research methods you used in the beginning of the communications planning process. If you conducted a survey, conduct a follow-up survey. If you convened focus groups, ask some participants to talk to you about the Accountability Reports after the release.

## Media Content Analysis

In addition, and particularly if you live in a larger community, you may want to conduct a media content analysis. By reviewing the local media coverage of your district’s School Accountability Reports, you can systematically evaluate the effectiveness of key messages communicated to the media.

### Tips for completing a content analysis:

- Select a specific timeframe for the analysis, such as the week after the Colorado School Accountability Reports are released.
- Make sure you have obtained newspaper clippings/video transcripts for all stories covered during that week.
- Create a list of questions to ask about each story, such as “Is the overall tone of the story positive, negative or neutral?” or “How many key messages from the district are included in the story?”
- Clearly explain all terms used for measurement – for example, clearly define what constitutes “positive” or “negative” coverage.
- Tally responses to assess the effectiveness of the communication plan.
- Compare “before” and “after” effects – for example, if you hold a press conference, you can compare media coverage one week prior and one week following the press conference to assess the effectiveness of the press conference. Be aware, however, that other influences may affect media coverage beyond the press conference.

## Finally...

Evaluating your communication efforts helps you to refine your messages and find new and better ways to communicate with your community about student achievement. The Colorado School Accountability Reports create an opportunity to spotlight school, but they are but one piece of the puzzle. Schools and districts must demonstrate the big picture of accountability to the public year-round. Therefore, effective communication about student achievement should be among schools' and districts' highest priorities.

## Contact Information

This document could not have been possible without the generous help of members from COSPRA, CASB and CASE. If you would like more information on these active member organizations, or if you have questions about this resource book, please contact them directly at:

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**CASB . . . Jennifer Wayman Reeve, APR**; Director of Communications; 1200 Grant Street, Denver, CO 80203-2306; 303/832-1000 or 800/530-8430; [www.casb.org](http://www.casb.org)

**CASE . . . Derrol Moorhead**; Director of Marketing and Communications; 4101 South Bannock, Englewood, CO 80110; 303/762-8762; [www.co-case.org](http://www.co-case.org)

Special thanks to the following individuals who made significant contributions to this project:

Bruce Caughey – Public Information Coordinator, Douglas County Schools

Tanya Spasev – Manager, Media/Community Relations, Jefferson County School district

Jeanna Finch – Former director of Communications and Marketing, CASE

# Basic elements of a communications plan for the Accountability Report release

## 1. Research/information gathering

- Determine attitudes of staff and community through survey, focus groups, engagement sessions.

Get answers to the following questions and others:

- *What criteria do people use to determine school quality?*
- *What are the indicators of school success?*

## 2. Identify key audiences

- You cannot communicate to everyone. Determine which audiences are the most important to reach and the ones that will help you spread your message to others.

*Examples: teacher leaders, active parent groups, community opinion leaders, media*

## 3. Develop messages

Ask yourself the following questions:

- *What do we want to communicate to which audiences?*
- *How do we tailor our messages to speak to our audiences' concerns? (based on your research)*
- *What do we want our audiences to do as a result of our communication?*

Make sure your messages are clear, brief and easily understood by those outside of the education community.

## 4. Develop communication strategies

Develop the strategies you will use to communicate your message keeping in mind the following basic communication principles:

- Internal audiences—staff and active parents—are your first priority
- Two-way communication—listening as well as telling—is most effective
- At least some strategies should provide experiences for your audience (i.e. an opportunity for adults to take a sample CSAP test)

## 5. Evaluate efforts

Conduct follow-up research to determine which strategies were most successful. Determine where improvements need to be made in your communication plan.

**Parent Survey**  
Trinidad School District #1  
2000-2001 School Year

**Communication/Support**

1. When I seek information from the schools, the information is complete and accurate.
2. Parents, students, teachers and principals work together to solve problems in the school.
3. Teachers are supportive of parents
4. The principal is supportive of parents and parent groups.
5. I am pleased with the leadership provided by the school principal.
6. Teachers and staff take a real interest in my child's future.
7. Parents are welcomed to share ideas for school improvement with administration and staff.
8. It is easy for me to get in to see an administrator at his building.
9. If I have concerns, the administrators of this school are willing to listen to me.

**Academic Considerations**

1. The teachers keep parents informed about students' academic progress.
2. To the best of my knowledge, teachers at this school have the same level of expectation of achievement for students of all ethnic groups.
3. I expect my child will graduate from high school.
4. I expect my child to further his/her education after high school.
5. I believe my child's time at school is well used.
6. Teachers at this school are interested and cooperative when I discuss my child's academic progress.
7. Parent-teacher conferences focus on my child's achievement and mastery of basic skills.
8. To the best of my knowledge, my child's teachers will provide additional help when needed.

**Safety and Environment**

1. Do you feel student misbehavior affects your child's education?
2. School buildings are generally bright, clean, and kept in good repair.
3. I believe my child is safe at school.
4. Student behavior problems are handled properly at this school.
5. School rules are enforced consistently and fairly.
6. There is a positive school spirit at this building.
7. The parent organization at this school is considered important by the administration

## **Community Engagement ♦ Sample Facilitator Script**

- **Welcome and introduce self**
- **Explain purpose of engagement session**

One of the school board's main jobs is to reflect the values of the community in the policies it adopts and the actions it takes. The board has asked you here today to participate in a community conversation about your ideas, concerns and values as they relate to student achievement.

The board members here today are here just to listen. While the board may not adopt all of the ideas or concerns you express today, the board will consider what you say about policy-level concerns carefully.

- **Grounding** [helps establish trust and rapport]

Facilitator asks each person to answer these questions:

- **Introduce yourself.**
- **What is your relationship to this school district?**
- **What do you hope to get out of today's session?**
- **How do you feel about being here?**

- **Roles and Operating Norms**

Explain the role of the facilitator: to keep the group on task, but not to participate in the discussion; remain neutral

Explain the role of the recorder: to take accurate notes on what is said

Operating norms: The facilitator should get agreement (head nods) from the participants on each of the following:

When I pose a question or topic for discussion, everyone should feel encouraged to participate. Sometimes we will go around the room and answer questions one by one; other times our conversation will be more free flowing. In either event, I ask each of you to participate in the discussion. Keep in mind that the board is here to listen to your honest input and insights.

**Does everyone agree to participate as honestly and openly as possible?**

Everyone's ideas are important. In every group, there are quiet people and not-so-quiet people. I will be making a special effort to include everyone, so there may be times when I'll need to move the conversation on or give someone else an opportunity to participate. I also ask that you each refrain from side conversations and give your full attention to the person who is speaking. **Do you each agree to listen with respect? Is it okay for me to move the conversation forward when needed or call on you when necessary?**

We are not here today to reach consensus on any given issue. Rather, we are here to talk about issues that affect student achievement in our school district. We may agree on some

things, we may disagree on others. This conversation will inform the board's thinking and give it an increased awareness of what the community is thinking and feeling. Tension is natural and good when people are talking about things they care deeply about -- like education. So it's important for us to make these agreements about how we will conduct our conversation here tonight.

**Does anyone have questions before we begin?**

## **5. Engagement Session**

The board needs to develop questions ahead of time. The questions should relate to a policy level concern, rather than an operational issue. You should begin with a more general opening question and then move into more specific questions.

Here are some examples of general opening questions:

- **What was school like for you?**
- **How is school different today than it was when you went to school?**

Here are some examples of more specific questions:

- **What are the most important skills our students need to learn before they graduate?**
- **If you had to grade this school, what grade would you give it? Why?**
- **What criteria should be used to determine a school's quality?**
- **How can this school district best demonstrate accountability to parents and other taxpayers?**

### • **Closing**

- **Were there any areas of agreement in our discussion?**
- **What were the most significant areas of disagreement?**
- **How do you feel about the time you spent here?**

### • **Thank you**

Thank you for being here this evening. You have given of your time to help us better understand the community's values around education in this school district. The board will use what it has learned here tonight in its work as the policy-making body for the school district. Thanks again for your participation.

*Follow up: The board should have the recorder's tag sheets typed up and given to all board members, superintendent/staff and community members who participated in the engagement session.*

Colorado Association of School Boards  
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# School Accountability Reports

## Communications/10 Keys for Promoting Your School Report Card Results

*Prepared by the Colorado School Public Relations Association*

### 1. Pick your headline.

No matter how hard you try to avoid it, most likely you're going to get a story in your local media which compares you to other schools. So by planning now, you can help shape your headline. Work with your local site council to determine what three things you want people to remember about your school's data. Frame your remarks around these things. Draw your responses to questions back to these issues. Make sure they are prominent in the materials you produce to explain your school's progress. If you do this, chances are these three things will be underscored in the stories written or aired about your school's results.

Make a one-page summary of your results with highlights and bullet points in easy-to-understand terms.

### 2. Avoid Jargon.

Using jargon is the quickest way to confuse people and sabotage your communication efforts. Using jargon can anger people by making them feel like you're talking "down" to them. It's often very difficult for school officials to spot jargon because it is an integral part of communicating specific information with our colleagues. When writing an explanation intended for the public, ask yourself, "How would I explain this to my parents, grandparents or neighbor?" Run your ideas past a non-educator. Ask him to be honest and to tell you when he doesn't understand your point or explanation. Remember that you're not writing a "how-to" manual. Avoid using sentences with more than 15 words. And paragraphs should be no more than three sentences long. Use the "KISS" rule - keep it simple, stupid.

### 3. Relate your results back to your School Improvement Plan.

You and your community should be able to see a direct correlation between what you've set as targets in your improvement plan and your school's progress results. This also makes the case for doing what you said you wanted to do. If you targeted math and you see the biggest jump in math results--tout it! You did what you said you were going to do and that's the purpose of your local school improvement plan. Likewise, if you didn't specifically target reading and your scores dipped slightly--perhaps you may choose to focus more on reading in your next plan. The bottom line is you are following your action plan--the school improvement plan. Your report card should show the fruits of your labor.

#### **4. Keep your site council up to speed.**

This is your direct tie to the community and each site council member should be trained as a community relations ambassador. When it comes to finding out the "scoop" on how well your school is performing, let's face it, community members tend to have the most credibility--even more than school officials. That's why it's crucial that each site council member be prepared and feels comfortable explaining what is happening at the school and how students' academic performance is being boosted. They should know where your school's strengths are and how you are addressing its weaknesses. Encourage these people to talk with any community organization or group with which they are associated.

#### **5. Build credibility.**

Tell the good, the bad and the ugly. Everyone knows no one is perfect. Schools are no exception. But if you only tell the picture-perfect stories, your messages will soon lose credibility. If you are the first one to tell your community where your weak areas are and then describe how you plan to address them, your community will be more understanding. They have to feel like you are telling them the whole story in order to build confidence in you. After telling your community about how you plan to address weak areas, the key is that you follow up later and report your progress. Being able to deliver on issues like this will boost public confidence in you and your schools.

#### **6. Take time to explain.**

People can't understand your school's progress if they don't understand the whole issue of making your schools better. The key to a school's progress is improving continuously. Even good schools must get better. Also, the issues involved in describing school improvement can be rather complex. Make sure you take ample time to explain the issues and how your school fits into that picture. Question and answer sheets are a good tool to use, but also plan for small, informal face-to-face meetings with people so you can help them understand--and they realize you want them to understand. By keeping your message simple, you'll draw attention to the fact that your results support your message. Also, make sure you are communicating in all the native languages of your community.

#### **7. Focus on growth.**

Sometimes it's easy to get caught up in test scores and lose sight of the growth your school is showing. To avoid this, focus your comments, reports and explanation on the amount of growth your school is showing. This doesn't mean hide the scores. But rather, make the amount of growth meaningful to your community. Particularly on the Colorado Student Assessment Program assessments, it can be easy to misunderstand what the test scores mean. For example, proficiency does not equal grade level. New proficiency standards are often set very high, well above the national average definition of "grade level." If you had set goals for the number of students you said you wanted to

see move from below proficient to proficient, make that a focal point. And, don't forget to show the number of students who went from proficient to advanced if there was an increase. You can do this easily by creating your own customized report card, using graphs wisely and keeping it easy to understand.

#### **8. Don't sugarcoat your results.**

Tell your school's progress results, but don't pontificate. And be careful that your explanations don't become excuses. There's a difference between telling how you plan to address areas of weakness and offering excuses for results that didn't meet your expectations. In a recent A Plus Communications survey, parents indicated they didn't want excuses and warned educators not to dwell on the socio-economic make up of their student test takers.

#### **9. If your results aren't what you expect or want, tell what you're doing about it.**

Then, get others Involved. Again, don't hide the fact that you may not have met your expectations. Do tell how you are addressing the issue. Be sure to share ways your community can help get involved so that improved results are seen next time. Give everyone a role. Make school improvement everyone's business.

#### **10. Don't focus only on the CSAP assessment results.**

Remember that the CSAP results are only one part of your school's achievement record. It's critical to include local test information and school programs that are a part of your school's improvement plan.

Often it's these local programs that make your school different from the rest.

# **Get your message out through Key Communicators**

## **What are Key Communicators?**

People among your staff or in your community who are influential in matters relating to education. They are people others go to for answers; people who are believed. They are often called opinion leaders.

## **Are Key Communicators community leaders?**

Not necessarily. They may be community leaders. However, more often they are just “regular folk” from your community — your school custodian, a retired teacher, the local beautician, a stay-at-home mom who volunteers at school, etc.

## **What’s the benefit of Key Communicators?**

There are three major benefits of developing a Key Communicators network.

1. They help you spread your message by extending your network of credible spokespeople on education matters.
2. They help you tailor your messages and anticipate issues by providing you information on what they are hearing from others.
3. They can help you defeat the rumor mill because they are the grapevine that you feed with accurate information.

## **How do I start a Key Communicators program?**

It’s easy. Just brainstorm with your staff or school board and come up with a list of people on your staff or in your community who are opinion leaders. Think of those who can help you present your messages and tell you what’s going on in the community. Then ask them if they are willing to help. You may also want to ask them if they know others who would be good candidates for the Key Communicators network. The number of people in your network is not important. Just make the network manageable for you.

## **How do I communicate with my Key Communicators?**

Communicate with them often and provide them more and different information than you would provide to the whole community. Remember, you are counting on them to help you carry your message, so you need to provide them enough information to do so. Also, it is very important that you use your Key Communicators network to get information back to you, so regularly ask them what they are hearing about school issues. Use a variety of methods for communicating with your Key Communicators: phone calls, e-mails, one-on-one meetings, small group meetings, short surveys and

written pieces. The important thing is that you use this group so that their time and input is valued. And...don't forget to thank them for their assistance!

For more information:  
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Director of Communications  
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303-832-1000 or 800-530-8430  
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Use these talking points in presentations about the School Accountability Reports or in media interviews.

## Talking Points: School Accountability Reports

- The School Accountability Reports, formerly referred to as School Report Cards, will be issued in September 2001 by the Colorado Department of Education.
- The reports will be issued for every school within a district. Each will contain a rating, not a grade. The first-year ratings will be: Excellent, High, Average, Low or Unsatisfactory. In the following years, the ratings will indicate the degree by which the school improved.
- The state report cards will primarily focus on student performance by using scores from the Colorado Student Assessment Program tests. CSAP reports student results in relation to the Colorado Academic Content Standards set by the state and school districts to define what students should know and be able to do. There will be information about staff, student/teacher ratios, teacher experience and information about the school environment, safety and discipline and student attendance.
- Colorado educators are concerned that the reports focus primarily on CSAP scores in reading, writing and math to rate a school's academic performance. Most districts use more than one diagnostic approach to measure student growth in a broader range of subject areas. They are also concerned that CSAPs are administered in early spring and results are received after school is out, leaving a wide gap in time to make adjustments or adaptations that affect a particular class of students.
- Educators don't want people to judge their schools on only one piece of evidence. They would like parents and community members to have the whole picture of what they are doing in their classrooms. Parent and community involvement increases a school's opportunity to succeed. If parents want to see the larger picture, they might attend a school accountability meeting, or seek a copy of the school's action plan, which usually outlines what direction the school will take and includes several indicators of how the school is doing and how it plans to improve.
- While so much focus is placed on the CSAPs and the classrooms, there are other factors that contribute to a student's and a classroom's success. Children should come to school prepared – they should be appropriately clothed and fed. Do they have their parent's support at home? For instance, do parents read to them? Have parents prepared their children for kindergarten with preschool programs or by

working with them on numbers, the alphabet or by reading to them? These factors make a huge difference in how well a child performs and adapts to school.

- For parents concerned about their child's individual score on CSAP, the new CSAP parent reports will not just tell if a student is proficient or not. It will provide diagnostic information and break down the results to see where the student was strong or weak.

**Ideas for speakers:**

- Bring a parent with you who is on the SAC and has knowledge of and can help you relate report findings to the school's action plan or accreditation contract.
- Have examples of what you are doing to change areas of weakness or how you plan to make improvements at your school.
- Don't be afraid to tell the light and the dark sides, but have good information about what you plan to do to change the "bad" news.
- Bring materials and assessment results from other tests that show growth at your school.
- Use your school's data and tout your successes!

Use these questions and answers in school or district newsletters or with your local media.

## **Questions & Answers about Colorado School Accountability Reports, a.k.a. Report Cards**

### **1. What is the Accountability Report?**

Formerly referred to as the School Report Cards, the School Accountability Reports will be produced by the Colorado Department of Education to provide a report of a school's performance to the public, educators and lawmakers. They are scheduled for release for the first time in September 2001.

### **2. What will be included?**

The state accountability reports will primarily focus on student performance by using scores from the Colorado Student Assessment Program tests. CSAP reports student results in relation to the Colorado Academic Content Standards set by the state and school districts to define what students should know and be able to do. There will be information about staff, student/teacher ratios, teacher experience and information about the school environment, safety and discipline and student attendance.

### **3. Do CSAPs cover all subject areas?**

CSAP tests are given in reading, writing and math at multiple grade levels, while the science CSAP test is administered only to eighth graders.

### **4. How will we know how schools are performing in other subject areas?**

That will not be included on the report card. However, the State Board of Education has adopted accreditation rules that require schools to report student achievement results in other content areas such as social studies, foreign language, history, etc.

### **5. What do educators think about the Accountability Reports?**

Most educators agree that the CSAPs are good tests because they are rigorous and reflect the Colorado standards; however, they do have concerns about the limitations of the reports. For instance:

- a. **Not the only measure.** They feel CSAP results are not the only measure of how well a school or district is doing.

- b. **Other assessments.** Schools administer other tests and forms of assessment to gain student progress for CSAP subjects as well as other subject areas.
- c. **CSAP score interpretation.** There is confusion about how CSAP is scored and reported. That confusion may be enhanced by the Accountability Report Card, which will use the terms Excellent, High, Average, Low or Unsatisfactory. CSAP scores are reported by advanced, proficient, partially proficient or unsatisfactory. Many media reports about CSAP scores indicate that schools are failing if students are below proficient. In fourth grade writing, for example, the proficiency cutoff was set roughly equal to the national 70<sup>th</sup> percentile (instead of the 50<sup>th</sup> percentile or “grade level” average). Raising the performance of all children to a new higher standard is an admirable goal, but the schools should not be judged to be failing when 34 percent of the state’s fourth graders meet a standard met by only 30 percent of the fourth graders nationally.
- d. **Home environment.** There are other factors that contribute to student success that go beyond the classroom such as what background and experience do the students have when they enter the school (preschool, adults reading to them, etc)? Do their parents read to them? Are they prepared when they come to school (clothed and fed properly)? Are study and academics supported at home? Is a study environment provided at home?

**6. If we are concerned about our school’s grade or rating, how can we find out more about what our school is doing?**

- a. Visit teachers or the School Accountability Committee and ask to see the school’s action plan.
- b. Ask to see reports on some of the district tests or other forms of assessment.
- c. Ask your school for a copy of its improvement plan or of its or the district’s annual report to find other performance indicators.
- d. Visit your school to see what is offered and to obtain a sense of the school’s environment.
- e. Get involved with your schools.

*For more information, contact:* [Fill in name and contact information of appropriate individual from your school/district]

## **Key Questions to Consider When Designing Your School or District Report Card**

1. When do you want the report card out in the community?

2. What are safe schools?

- By student standards
- By parent standards
- By community standards

How do you show it?

3. What is achievement?

- By students' standards
- By parent standards
- By community standards

Presented by David Van Sant, PhD, Trinidad School District #1  
719.846.3324; davidvansant@trinidad.k12.co.us

# **Developing Your District —Your School Report Card**

Additional Considerations:

1. What are the state descriptors?
2. How will the state show progress?
3. How are other school districts doing things?

Presented by David Van Sant, PhD, Trinidad School District #1  
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The report shall be provided to the parents/guardians of students in the school, to local media and others interested in the schools, and to members of the public who request it. The report may be included or inserted in the state-generated accountability report as long as the school report does not refute information included in the state-generated report.

Because the Board believes that a supportive and involved public is crucial to the safety and achievement of students in district schools, it directs the superintendent to work with the Board to develop and implement a district-wide, year-round communication plan around safety and student achievement that:

- includes two-way communication involving both listening and telling activities
- has a primary goal of building productive relationships between the district, Board, staff, parents, students and community members
- promotes dialogue between the district, Board, staff, parents, students and community members around issues of importance to the community
- is targeted to include different messages and different strategies depending on the audience
- includes strategies for communicating internally as well as outside the district

The Board directs each district school to gather and accurately report data required by law to be reported for the state-generated accountability report. The Colorado Department of Education is required by law to deliver the report to each public school by September 1 51h each year. Within a reasonable time from receipt of the report, each school shall distribute the report to the parents/guardians of each student enrolled in the school and to members of the public who request it.

(Adoption date)

LEGAL REFS.: C. R. S. 22-7-605 (*report format and data reporting requirements*)  
C.R.S. 22-7-606 (*report delivery*)  
C. R. S. 22-7-608 (*procedures instituted by the state board for schools receiving academic rating or "low"*)  
C. R. S. 22-7-609 (*school improvement plan or charter required for schools receiving academic rating of "unsatisfactory"*)

CROSS REFS.: AE, Accountability/Commitment to Accomplishment  
AED, School District Accreditation  
IKE, Ensuring All Students Meet Standards  
IL, Evaluation of Instructional Programs  
ILBA, District Program Assessments  
ILBB, State Program Assessments

**[Revised June 2001]**  
COLORADO SAMPLE POLICY 2000@

**Accountability Process Timeline**

By September 1	<p>School-level accountability committee adopts building goals/objectives, and a plan to improve educational . achievement, maximize graduation rates and increase the <u>ratings</u> for the school's accreditation category. (C.R.S. 22-7-205(l))</p> <p>Goals/objectives and plans reviewed by district accountability committee and recommendations submitted to Board. (C.R.S. 22-7-205(l))</p>
After September 15	<p>Within a reasonable time after receipt of the state accountability report, each school shall distribute the accountability report to parents/guardians of each student and to members of the public who request it. A school-generated report may be included or inserted in the state accountability report as long as the school report does not refute information included in the state report. (C.R.S. 22-7-606)</p>
By October 1	<p>After consultation with district accountability committee, Board compiles school building goals/objectives and plans and reports the district's goals/objectives and the district's plan to improve educational achievement, maximize graduation rates and increase the ratings for each school's accreditation category to the public. (C.R.S. 22-7-205(2))</p>
By December 1	<p>Board disseminates a written report to the taxpayers and local community regarding progress on district and school accreditation indicators. The report shall be made available to the State Board of Education, the general assembly, the governor and the public at large. (C.R.S. 22-11-105(2), 1 CCR 301-1, Rules 220,9-R.O.00)</p>
Prior to adopting	<p>School-level accountability committee makes budget for fiscal recommendations to Board, district accountability year committee and superintendent relative to prioritization of expenditures of district moneys by the school. (C.R.S. 22-7-207)</p> <p>Superintendent considers recommendations by school level committees when formulating budget requests presented to Board. (C.R.S. 22-7-207)</p> <p>Board considers recommendations prior to adopting budget. (C.R.S. 22-7-105)</p>

**[Revised June 2001**  
 COLORADO SAMPLE EXHIBIT 1990@



**Colorado School District Websites Posting Accountability Data, Survey Tools or Report Card Information**

CASE surveyed all district superintendents. These respondents indicated that their websites contained accountability data, survey information or report card ideas. You are encouraged to tap into these sites for templates and resources.

District Name	Website Address	Accountability	Survey	Report Card
Academy 20	<a href="http://www.d20.co.edu">www.d20.co.edu</a>			
Adams County Dist. 50	<a href="http://www.adams50.k12.co.us">www.adams50.k12.co.us</a>			
Archuleta—Pagosa Springs	<a href="http://www.pagosa.k12.co.us">www.pagosa.k12.co.us</a>			
Aspen Public Schools	<a href="http://www.mogul.ahs.aspen.k12.co.us">www.mogul.ahs.aspen.k12.co.us</a>			
Aurora Public Schools	<a href="http://www.aps.k12.co.us">www.aps.k12.co.us</a>			
Boulder Valley	<a href="http://www.bvsvd.k12.co.us">www.bvsvd.k12.co.us</a>	<a href="#">/plan/toc.htm</a>		Throughout the site
Calhan Dist. RJ-1	<a href="http://www.highwired.com/cals">www.highwired.com/cals</a>			<a href="http://www.highwired.com/cals">www.highwired.com/cals</a>
Cherry Creek District 5	<a href="http://www.ccsd.k12.co.us">www.ccsd.k12.co.us</a>			<a href="#">/assess/schools_alpha.htm</a>
Cheyenne Mountain Dist. 12	<a href="http://www.cmsd.k12.co.us">www.cmsd.k12.co.us</a>			<a href="http://www.cmsd.k12.us.co">www.cmsd.k12.us.co</a>
Clear Creek Dist. Re-1	<a href="http://www.clearcreekre1.org">www.clearcreekre1.org</a>			<a href="http://www.clearcreekre1.org">www.clearcreekre1.org</a>
Denver Dist. 1	<a href="http://www.denver.k12.co">www.denver.k12.co</a>	<a href="#">us/default.htm</a>		<a href="http://testing.dpsh.s.org">testing.dpsh.s.org</a>
Dolores Re-4A	<a href="http://www.dolores.k12.co.us">www.dolores.k12.co.us</a>			
Douglas County	<a href="http://www.dcsd.k12.co.us">www.dcsd.k12.co.us</a>			
Durango Dist. 9-R	<a href="http://www.durango.k12.co.us">www.durango.k12.co.us</a>	<a href="#">/ar/home.htm</a>		

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<b>District Name</b>	<b>Website Address</b>	<b>Accountability</b>	<b>Survey</b>	<b>Report Card</b>
Englewood Public Schools	<a href="http://www.inglewoodschools.org">www.inglewoodschools.org</a>			
Fountain Dist. 8	<a href="http://www.ffc8.org">www.ffc8.org</a>			<a href="http://www.ffc8.org">www.ffc8.org</a>
Gilpin County Dist. Re-1	<a href="http://www.gilpin.k12.co.us">www.gilpin.k12.co.us</a>			
Jefferson County	<a href="http://www.204.98.12">www.204.98.12</a>			
Littleton Public Schools	<a href="http://www.littletonpublic.schools.net">www.littletonpublic.schools.net</a>			
Manitou Springs Dist. 14	<a href="http://www.sd14web.mssd14.k12.co.us">www.sd14web.mssd14.k12.co.us</a>			
Mesa County alley Dist. 51	<a href="http://www.mesa.k12.co.us">www.mesa.k12.co.us</a>			
Montrose Dist. Re-1J	<a href="http://www.mcsd.org">www.mcsd.org</a>			
Platte Canyon Dist. 1	<a href="http://www.fen.com/co/bailey">www.fen.com/co/bailey</a>			
Poudre School District	<a href="http://www.psd.k12.co.us">www.psd.k12.co.us</a>			
St. Vrain Valley Dist. Re1J	<a href="http://www.stvrain.k12.co.us">www.stvrain.k12.co.us</a>			<a href="http://www.stvrain.k12.co.us">www.stvrain.k12.co.us</a>
Thompson District R2J	<a href="http://www.thompson.k12.co.us">www.thompson.k12.co.us</a>			
West Grand 1 JT	<a href="http://www.westgrand.k12.co.us">www.westgrand.k12.co.us</a>			