

Shaping Tomorrow Today

Public Education

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A Community Newsletter of the Jefferson County Education Association

March/2007

NEA's Read Across America celebrates literacy

Ten years ago, the National Education Association (NEA) and its 3.2 million members started a reading revolution.

From a one-day celebration of Dr. Seuss's birthday, "Read Across America Day" has grown to become a year-round literacy campaign reaching nearly every home, school, and community. NEA's Read Across America is building a nation of readers.

Our 10th annual Read Across America celebration will once again honor Dr. Seuss, the man who epitomizes reading fun, on his birthday, March 2.

This year is extra special as we also celebrate the 50th birthday of THE CAT IN THE HAT, a book that continues to capture the imaginations of children everywhere.

Many Jeffco schools have events planned throughout the week. We urge you to contact your school PTA and see how you can get in on the fun. If you are not a parent, but want to help promote literacy, just call your neighborhood school and volunteer to read.

We know many of you will not have an opportunity to visit your school during the week of March 2, but that doesn't mean you can't promote reading for your children, grandchildren, or nieces and nephews. There's much you can do to encourage a child to read, and to keep reading.

The love of reading is contagious

Parents play a special role in demonstrating to children of all ages that reading is valuable and enjoyable. Here are some tips:

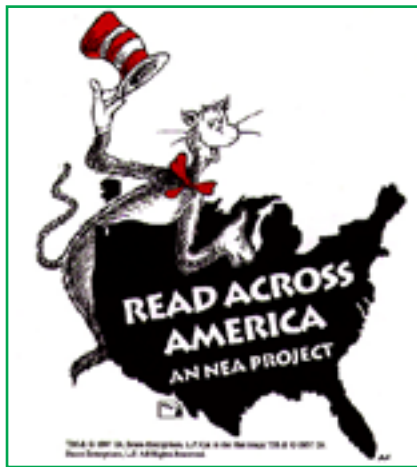
- Set a good example as a reader—let kids see you reading every day.
- Get a subscription to an age-appropriate magazine for your child. When relatives and others ask for gift ideas, suggest magazine subscriptions, books, or a book store gift certificate.
- Make reading fun—a time that you and your children look forward to spending together.
- Check out *The Read-Aloud Handbook* by Jim Trelease (New York: Penguin Books, 1995). It's loaded with fun tips and reading recommendations.
- Keep lots of books, magazines, and newspapers around the house.

- Get on board a Jeffco tradition and visit the public library often.
- Shop for books at garage and yard sales, swap meets, and used bookstores.
- Don't fret if "Captain Underpants" has captivated your children rather than **Robinson Crusoe**. The important thing: they are reading! Encourage it and they will likely move on to more sophisticated titles as they get older.

When your children start school, they still need you to read to them at home. Your children will do better in school, and you'll enjoy the time spent together.

Here are helpful tips for reading to and with young children in kindergarten through third grade:

- Keep reading to your children even when they can read. Read books that are too difficult or long for them to read alone.
- Try reading books with chapters and talk about what is happening in the story. Encourage your children to make predictions about what will happen next, and connect characters or events to those in other books and stories.
- Talk with your children about reading preferences that are beginning to develop. Ask whether they like adventure stories, mysteries, science fiction, animal stories, or stories about other children. Encourage them to explain the reasons for their preferences.
- Talk with your children about favorite authors and help them find additional books by those authors.
- Take turns reading a story with your child. Don't interrupt to correct mistakes that do not change the meaning.
- Talk about the meaning of new words and ideas introduced in books. Help your children think of examples of new concepts.
- Talk with your children about stories using the notions of the beginning, middle, and end of the story to organize thinking and discussion.
- Ask your children to tell why a character might have taken a specific action. Ask for information from the story to support the answer.



Enjoy yourself and have fun! The most important thing you can do to help your child become a successful reader is to communicate that reading is valuable and enjoyable.

JCEA continues focus on quality teaching & learning



by Nancy Henderson,
JCEA President

Over the last few weeks, JCEA's leadership team has been visiting many of our schools on what we call a "listening tour." We are asking four questions: 1. Why do you do what you do? 2. What energizes you in your job? 3. What drains your energy? 4. What can the association do to help you to be able to focus your energy on kids and learning?

What we are hearing reinforces the concerns we discovered last spring in our Teaching and Learning survey in which 84% of the respondents said the district was headed in the wrong direction. Since then, JCEA has spent much time trying to better understand what drives this disturbing perception.

Our tour has convinced us teachers really do believe that every child can learn. They believe it is important to set high expectations for every child. And they believe that much of the work the district is doing to support quality teaching is important and, in fact, long overdue.

It may be hard to believe, but teachers and students today are paying dearly for the deep budget cuts that began in 1988 and continued through 1991. From an instructional stand point, the most devastating decision came in the early 1990s when the district eliminated curriculum support for classroom teachers and dismantled its once heralded staff development division. Absent a district curriculum and training to support it, teachers were left to teach to generalized standards using whatever materials they could find.

In the last few years, the district has recognized the need to correct that mistake and is now furiously trying to put curriculum in place that aligns with standards and testing requirements. That effort, along with everything else, is putting an incredible strain on teachers and our district as a whole.

JCEA is responding with an initiative to keep the district's focus on the practical reality of teaching and learning. We call it "**Time to Teach-Time to Plan-Time to Learn!**" We feel this summarizes the mood of Jeffco teachers and conveys what's important to them.

Time to Teach – The profession of teaching has become increasingly complex with added assessments, monitoring systems and targeted interventions. When I listen to all that teachers are required to do (by the government and the school district), I literally gasp and say, "When do you have time to teach your students?!"

Teachers are quick to acknowledge the value of most of the mandated programs – and all their component parts. They want to implement these programs; it's simply a case of not enough time to do it all well.

For example, it makes sense to regularly test students—in groups and individually — to measure their progress. Doing so helps teachers adjust their instruction in a timely and effective way. The difficulty is that teachers are now giving so many assessments in so many different subjects they do not have adequate time to evaluate what the assessments are telling them. Further, there is not enough time in the workday to complete all of the required student assessments. We are getting an increasing number of reports that teachers are using sick days to complete the assessments.

The truth is that after many hours outside of the school day and

on weekends, there still isn't enough time to adequately do all that is required *and* to deliver quality instruction to every student. Teachers are most frustrated that the overloading of demands takes away from valuable time with students.

Therefore, our first initiative emphasizes that teachers need time to teach—to work directly with their students. To this end, we are calling on the school district to work with teachers to prioritize and focus (and appropriately eliminate) some of the instructional initiatives and assessment currently in our schools.

Further, we remind the district that no one knows students and their needs better than the classroom teacher. And no one knows the impact and value of all of these mandated programs better than we. It is time teachers had seats at the decision-making table of every school.

Time to Plan – Because of increased expectations, workload demands and changes in technology, individual time to plan for instruction has been compromised for too many teachers. This daily planning time is essential for all teachers. In order to teach current content matter and adapt dynamic classroom management, a teacher must have daily time to plan.

For example, in order to meet the needs of their students, teachers are increasingly moving toward individualized and small group instruction, thus targeting their learning needs and maximizing time. But to do that effectively we must have access to the school's materials and resources. This type of planning is best done at school where these resources are located.

Technology is also cutting into a teacher's planning time. Teachers get hundreds of emails and voice mails a week. Most schools have a policy of responding to each within 24 hours. Much of the time that used to be spent on planning for instruction is now devoted to communicating with parents and staff. That's not a bad thing, in fact it's desirable. But the current structure of our school day does not permit all of this important work to get done.

Teachers are also spending significant amounts of time in rudimentary data entry—attendance and grades—in an effort to improve communication between the school and home. Again, this is highly desirable, but it too is eroding the time teachers have to plan and prepare for their essential function—teaching.

When teachers cannot adequately use their time at school to plan, the quality of education for our students can inevitably suffer.

Time To Learn – During our listening tour, a teacher told me the main reason she likes her job is that she likes to teach *and* she likes to learn. Teachers are lifelong learners and proudly so. Professional development is welcomed by our teachers, but we want it to be relevant and meaningful. And, like our students, we want time to practice what we've just been taught. Time to learn means professional development should not be one more add-on to an already crowded day, nor should it involve numerous pull-out days, taking us away from the classroom and children. That is not good learning!

JCEA is now at the negotiations table with the school district talking about these very issues. The degree to which we are able to address these concerns will determine the success of these talks.

For me, contract talks are kinda like snowstorms: I will hope for the best, but be prepared for a blizzard. Rest assured, if the blizzard comes, JCEA will be communicating with you. Until then, know that we share your desire for quality teaching and learning in JPS.

Governor Ritter signs HB 1048, CSAP reform

"The signing of House Bill 1048 takes us one giant step closer to useful testing data that will help teachers, students and parents," declared Beverly Ingle, president of the Colorado Education Association. "We are so pleased that this is the first education bill to be signed by Governor Ritter."

HB 1048 directs the Governor and the Colorado Department of Education to convene a technical advisory panel to speed development and implementation of a method that permits teachers and parents to see how students are progressing over time. Currently,



students' scores are compared to the previous year's group at the same grade level. As a result, test data are relatively meaningless.

"The importance of motivating students and rewarding their achievement cannot be overestimated. Currently, students are discouraged and frustrated by being labeled as unsatisfactory or partially proficient by the CSAP ratings; when, in fact, they have made significant progress. This bill is good for students and teachers, and will also result in improved accountability for our

NCLB expires this year; Congress must improve, fund it



by Reg Weaver, NEA President

On the first day of school, a sixth-grader at a California middle school raised his hand and asked the teacher, "Is there anything we will be learning this year that we need to remember for longer than the test?"

That child's question tells us all we need to know about the flaws in the No Child Left Behind Act and its obsessive focus on high-stakes testing. Unfortunately, a proposal released by a special commission on NCLB would raise the stakes on standardized tests even higher, pit teachers against one another and make it harder to attract good teachers to the schools and subject areas where they are needed the most.

No Child Left Behind expires this year, and everyone agrees it must be improved before Congress extends it. The National Education Association has proposed positive changes in the law, including testing that better tracks student progress; smaller classes; a qualified teacher in every classroom; strong parental and community support of schools; and extra help for children who need it.

The much publicized Aspen Institute's NCLB commission report, released recently, had some good ideas as well, especially about the need to focus on early childhood education and reducing school dropouts. But its proposal to automatically brand one out of four teachers as ineffective based on students' test scores would be a disaster for teachers and students alike.

The proposal to define and rank teachers in every state manages to be arbitrary and convoluted at the same time. It assumes that the 75% of teachers whose classes show the greatest gain in test scores are all "effective," and the other 25% are not. This ignores many factors beyond a teacher's

control that affect test scores, including class size and resources that vary from school to school.

Under this proposal, a teacher who urged a troubled student not to drop out of school would actually be penalized if that student scored poorly on standardized tests. Since the ratings would only apply to math, reading and science teachers, they would make it harder to attract good teachers to these critical subjects. They would also discourage good teachers from working in schools with high numbers of struggling students.

One test on one day does not measure student learning, and it certainly should not be used to measure a teacher's effectiveness. Rather than trying to make teachers the scapegoats for the challenges in public education, it would be more useful to address all the factors that affect learning.

The No Child Left Behind Act promised federal help for smaller classes, but the resources to achieve that goal have not been provided. The same goes for preschool programs, tutoring, teacher professional development and support for parents.

If we want to talk about "accountability" in education, let's start by asking why those promises of the No Child Left Behind Act have not been kept.

If we truly want to improve the quality of teachers in the classroom, let's give them more opportunities to improve their skills, provide better working conditions and offer salaries competitive with other professions that require a college degree — all measures that have actually worked in the real world.

JCEA welcomes new readers

JCEA is continually updating the mailing list for **Shaping Tomorrow Today**. If you are a new reader, welcome!

Obviously, this is a newsletter that reflects the thinking of the 5,000 teaching professionals in Jefferson County. We hope you find the information in this newsletter helpful and at times provocative. We want you to be able to trust the information you read in this newsletter and know that it reflects the integrity of our profession and JCEA.



Shaping Tomorrow Today

Shaping Tomorrow Today is the community newsletter of the Jefferson County Education Association (JCEA) and is published periodically throughout the year. Comments may be mailed to: JCEA, 1050 Wadsworth Blvd., Lakewood, CO 80214. Our phone number is 303-232-6405; our FAX number is 303-238-2215. Visit our web site at www.jcea-cea.org.

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FACT: The Colorado Paradox: Colorado is growing the economy with workers educated outside our borders. A report by the Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation noted that Colorado has the 4th highest percentage of college graduates in the nation but is 32nd in sending high school graduates to college.

FACT: Because of chronic budget shortages between 1988 and 1992, Jeffco Public Schools dramatically increased class sizes, eliminated its comprehensive school nursing program, eliminated curriculum coordinators, phased out support for curriculum development, eliminated secretarial support for middle school counseling centers, and decentralized decision-making. Many of the issues Jeffco is struggling with today are the direct result of cuts made over 15 years ago. Truly, cuts in education never heal!

FACT: Out of 178 Colorado school districts, JPS ranks 148 in per pupil funding. The range in **total per pupil funding** is from a high of \$13,151 (San Juan) to a low of \$5,689 (Moffat). JPS spends \$6,024.*

FACT: JPS also ranks 3rd in **total at-risk funding**. Denver is first with \$45,585,598; Kiowa is 178 with \$18,702. Jeffco receives \$12,457,198.*

*Source: "2006-07 Rankings of Colorado school districts on selected funding factors"; CEA Research, January 2007.

Visit our website @www.jcea-cea.org

For Your Information

Youth Leadership Jefferson County (YLJC) is an innovative program designed to develop the community leadership potential of high school students in Jefferson County. YLJC is a program of the West Chamber Serving Jefferson County Foundation.

Each full-day monthly session (September to May) focuses on one aspect of the community and emphasizes a key leadership concept. Monthly sessions include business, health, human services, public safety, justice, arts and media, education, and government.

YLJC provides real world experiences through multiple approaches including lecture, experiential hands-on activity, site visits, panels, case studies, and small group discussions.

For more information contact: Youth Leadership Jefferson County West Chamber Foundation, attention: Marta Murray, 1667 Cole Blvd., Bldg. 19, Suite 400 Lakewood, CO 8040. Phone: 303-233-5555; www.westchamber.org/youth.asp

Deadline: Applications for the 2007-08 class must be post-marked by Friday, April 27, 2007.

Good News Breakfast, April 24, 2007, is becoming an important Jeffco tradition. Since 1991, the Good News Coalition has brought Jeffco citizens together to celebrate the positive happenings and spiritual values that link our diverse communities. This year the breakfast will honor "Businesses Building Better Communities."

As usual, the event will start at 6:59 a.m. at the Jeffco Fair Grounds. Tickets remain \$12. For information contact Tami Shrader at Bandimere Speedway, 303-679-6013, Ext. 104. Seating is limited.

Our Mission Statement: *The Jefferson County Education Association exists to empower educators to promote professional rights, responsibilities and practices to achieve educational excellence within a changing society.*



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Jefferson County Education Association
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