

# Ski Country EduCator

January – December 2010

## What's in Store for the New Decade?

The coming years may see changes in the way we do business in K-12 education in Colorado. I am sure you have followed in the news about the serious shortfalls in tax revenue that Colorado and many of our school districts are experiencing. The news is not good. In latest reports school districts could see a total drop in per pupil funding of \$625 per student from this year to next. We will see a recession in school funding levels for anywhere from three to five years.

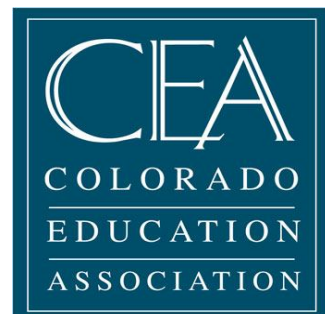
In addition to the school funding issue we also expect changes to our Public Employees Retirement System, which may include an increase in employee and employer contributions as well as a decrease in cost of living increases.

If this news wasn't already grim enough, several of our "Too Extreme" crowd in Colorado is sponsoring other ballot initiatives to cut taxes and to further constrict the ability of the legislature to pay for K-12 education, higher education, and public services essential to the welfare of Colorado.

There is also a movement from several legislators to change the way we evaluate teachers according to State Statute and to dramatically alter the way teachers obtain and retain non-probationary status. *... continued on the following page.*

Ski Country UniServ  
P.O. Box 1670  
Frisco, Colorado  
80443  
Phone (970) 668-0830  
1-800-545-4916  
E-mail [scuu@nea.org](mailto:scuu@nea.org)

Caroline Hanson,  
Unit Chair  
  
Dennis Carlson,  
Unit Director  
  
Barb Hodson,  
Office Manager



All of these changes must and will go through the legislative process or the Citizens initiative process in the coming months and possible years. There has never been a time when the role of the Association and your participation in the Association has been more vital.

Over the last few months our members in Ski Country UniServ and across the state have been contacting and talking with legislators asking them to “Honor Amendment 23” and fund K-12 education as is outlined in the Constitution. There are questions as to whether recommendations from the Legislative Joint Budget Committee and the Governor for cutting anywhere from 4% to 10% from K-12 funding are constitutional. You can be assured that CEA Legal will be on top of the question and in the forefront of any effort to make sure the Legislature and the Governor follow the Colorado Constitution and the law.

But still, it takes the effort of all of us working as one to protect our livelihoods, our profession, and the future of public education. The Association and Association membership have never been as crucial as it is now; and as it will be in the coming months and years. If we are not out there making our voices heard, talking to our legislators, demanding that education is the top priority; someone else will be out there making arguments against our best interests.

Get involved, stay informed, speak out, call and write your legislators, the Governor, any of your elected officials. Tell them to “Honor Amendment 23”. Tell them in order to achieve and maintain the high level of academic achievement that everyone expects of us we must have the resources and funding necessary. The only way to break out of the current economic recession is through a strong education system. A strong education system requires support from our communities, our citizens, and our elected officials.

...Dennis Carlson, Ski Country UniServ

**Individual commitment to a group effort -- that is what makes a team work, a company work, a society work, a civilization work.**

**...Vince Lombardi**

## *Ski Country UniServ has Moved*

*As of December 1st Ski Country is in a new location. We moved our office from Frisco to Dillon. The move saved us some money in our monthly lease agreement and also is much handier for Barb and Dennis to get to the office. Our phone number, fax number, and email addresses are the same. Our physical address is now 124 Main Street Dillon, Suite 203, Dillon, Colorado 80435. Our mailing address is still P.O. Box 1670 Frisco for the time being.*

## **Amazing Ski Country Members**

**Michele Conroy** of the **Moffat County Education Association** and **Ski County CEA Board Member** has been appointed by the Governor to the Quality Teachers Commission. The commission studies teacher and principal quality related to closing the achievement gap.

**Caroline Hanson** of the **Aspen Education Association** and **Ski County Unit Chair** participated in a Teacher Exchange program this fall where she spent several weeks teaching in Japan. The following is a report from Caroline on her fantastic experience.

This year, I was privileged to chaperone eight students on a trip to Hokkaido, Japan for the Aspen Sister Cities Program. The program pairs up eighth grade students in Aspen with *all* of the eighth grade students in the Japanese district of Shimukappu, a sister city on the northern island of Japan because it shares a resort economy with the Tomamu Ski Area. Seven eighth grade students attend Shimukappu Junior High School and one attends Tomamu Junior High School, so that set our numbers for the year. On the Aspen end, students from AMS, Aspen Community School, and Aspen Country Day School applied and interviewed for the slots in the Japan program. Each student and the chaperones stayed with a host family in Japan, and we reciprocated the hospitality here in Aspen.

Our October trip to Japan was amazing. Needless to say, the class sizes in the schools we visited differed greatly from our own. What struck all of us, including Assistant Superintendent John Maloy, the other chaperone, was the liveliness and closeness of the school communities. We have a perception of the Japanese schools as strict and data-driven, but we observed a community that sets high standards, upholds high expectations, yet still finds time to play and incorporate diverse activities into their school day.

The country itself rivals our own Rocky Mountains for its beauty and scenery. Although Hokkaido boasts many ski areas, the altitudes are far lower because of its Northern latitudes, so the topography is quite a bit different. Although our golden aspens are beautiful, Hokkaido hillsides are covered in hardwoods and the colors match the glorious displays of the northern Midwest and the Northeast. The island is also an agricultural

center for the nation, much like California and the west, with fields of rice, lavender, potatoes, onions, and fruit trees filling the valleys. The local food was a favorite for all of us: fresh fish, vegetables, rice, and ramen. We were all quite adventurous with our palates and mostly enjoyed what we ate. My least favorite dish was a raw squid soaking in a vivid orange "bowel juice." I don't care to eat it again.

We were treated with the utmost respect, sharing time with the mayor, the host committee, and all local dignitaries as well as the families. The Japanese were thrilled to learn American games and activities, so we shared the "Chicken Dance" at our farewell banquet and had everyone up and flapping their arms. A former Aspen student and Shimukappu exchange alumni now lives in Shimukappu, operating a restaurant with his wife. He served as interpreter and local guide for both groups.

When the Japanese arrived January 5, we tried to emulate their hospitality. They wanted to try all the American staples like hamburgers, pizza, tacos, hot dogs, and ice cream. Mayu, the teacher staying with me, was amazed by the variety in the City Market, and was shocked by the portion size. The Japanese also perceived our school of 450, small by American standards, as enormous. I'm sorry she could not see some of the suburban or urban schools to learn even more. They all enjoyed skiing Snowmass, visiting mines, and touring Aspen, but really what mattered was the interaction.

Despite the language barrier and the differences in food and culture, what we found is how alike we really are. Even though we are from different sides of the world, we shared similar life and family experiences and recognized that the similarities far outweigh the differences. Programs like Sister Cities are helping us understand the importance of cultural understanding and looking for what makes us part of the same world community. Especially in these troubled times, the exchange helps students see our groups as a "we" rather than Americans and Japanese. I cannot express the depth of this experience for me. I think we all agreed that our time together changed us all in some small way.

...Caroline Hanson, Aspen Education Association and Ski Country Unit Chair

## **It's your responsibility to know about child abuse laws in Colorado**

Child abuse and the sexual abuse of children are far from being taboo subjects in public schools. Unfortunately, they are real and we, as educators, must understand them. We provide you with this information for two reasons: to outline your personal responsibilities as an educator for reporting suspected abuse and to briefly explain laws regarding employees who are suspected of or charged with child abuse.

1. Colorado law requires that any school district employee who suspects a child has been subjected to abuse or neglect, or observes conditions which could result in abuse or

neglect must report or cause a report to be made, to either the county Social Services department or the local law enforcement agency. Failure to report is a misdemeanor, punishable by fine, imprisonment, or both. Our Association advises you to make the report yourself and not assume that an administrator will make the report for you even if you tell your suspicions to someone in your school.

2. The law goes out of its way to protect children and youth and encourage reporting. Unless the report is malicious, the reporting party is immune from liability. The report itself is confidential.

3. By law, Social Services and the police department must conduct a joint investigation including an interview with or observation of the child. The investigation usually includes an interview with the person accused of being responsible for the abuse or neglect. The investigatory interview is a critical step. We suggest that an employee accused of child abuse have an attorney present during all such interviews.

4. Courts are required to report to the Colorado Department of Education if current or former school employees are convicted of child abuse, sexual assault or abuse and other charges of unlawful behavior toward a child. Districts must notify CDE when an employee is dismissed or resigns because of allegations of unlawful behavior toward a child which are supported by credible evidence.

5. Before employing applicants for any job, districts must ask CDE if the department has information about an applicant and must contact previous employers. All new hires undergo this background check.

6. Districts must have rules that give due process to employees against whom false allegations of child abuse are made.

7. Schools boards are required to adopt discipline codes that recognize that some physical contact between students and employees may be the result of reasonable and appropriate physical intervention and force. State law protects employees who perform their duties responsibly in cases such as breaking up a fight between two students. The law says that an employee's actions do not constitute child abuse as long as they are performed in good faith, in compliance with the discipline code, and an appropriate expression of affection or emotional support.

8. A teacher's license can be annulled or denied if the person is convicted of child abuse or sexual assault on a child. A conviction in such cases, as well as a deferred sentence, guilty plea, and similar pleas, are reasons for dismissal from employment.

9. Criminal charges may be filed against an education employee in a child abuse case. An employee may also be subject to a civil lawsuit brought by the child or his parents, seeking damages for injuries to the child.

## Educators Meet in Washington to Discuss Alternative Pay

By [Cindy Long](#)

The National Education Association kicked off its Alternative Compensation Summit in Washington today (January 7<sup>th</sup>, 2010) -- an event packed with research findings and regional discussions on enhancements to the single salary schedule and alternatives to teacher pay based solely on student test scores.

Attendees of the two-day summit came from around the country, bringing their best ideas and strategies as the issue of alternative compensation takes hold of the debate around teacher effectiveness and performance.

“This is a tough and sometimes controversial topic to talk about,” said NEA President Dennis Van Roekel, whose welcoming remarks opened the summit. “We have affiliates on all sides of the issue. But this is an important conversation to have and that’s why this summit is so important.”

When it comes to alternative pay systems, we know one thing for sure, Van Roekel said: “If you don’t have the buy-in of educators, any system pursued is destined for failure.”

He said that now is not the time to simply say no, but to move the debate toward pay systems that can make a difference. Such systems might compensate teachers who agree to mentor new colleagues or offer incentives to teach in hard-to-staff schools, for example.

“At the end of the day, the question isn’t how to differentiate pay between teachers,” said Van Roekel. “The question is how to pay teachers a salary that encourages the creation of great public schools for every student.”

## Create a Reading Event for Read Across America Day March 2<sup>nd</sup>, 2010

The following is a simple scenario for elementary or middle school teachers who want to conduct an NEA's Read Across America event in their classroom. This is by far the most typical celebration and can be easily adapted to other situations.

- Consult your principal and obtain approvals. In our experience, principals love NEA's Read Across America. Most will not only support your efforts, they will become actively involved. If your principal hasn't heard of the program, refer him or her to this web site.
- Look at your school's calendar and choose a date to celebrate. The official day is March 2. If this conflicts with another event, feel free to pick a different day. Some schools celebrate the week before or after. *Talk to your principal and check your school calendar as early as possible to avoid any last minute problems.*
- [Read our copyright and licensing arrangements](#). It's important to honor our agreements with Dr. Seuss Enterprises in order to maintain our special relationship.
- Consult with your school librarian. It's likely that he or she is already familiar with Read Across America and may have ideas to offer. Reserve books in advance—there may be a run on Dr. Seuss titles!
- Ask other teachers if they are making plans. Consider coordinating your efforts for a school-wide event.
- Invite guest readers to come to your class on March 2 and read to your students. By far, this is the most popular activity. There is something powerful about a policeman, firefighter, mayor, radio personality, pastor, high school quarterback, or grandmother sharing their love for reading. Be sure and ask your guests to talk about why reading is important in their lives and about their favorite books when they were kids. Afterwards, have your students write thank-you notes.
- Make arrangements for a birthday cake, if resources allow. You might want to have it decorated with "Happy Birthday Dr. Seuss." If funds are short, ask if any parents are enthusiastic bakers. Easy alternatives are cupcakes or cookies. Add fruit punch or juice for a beverage.
- Get some hats! Everyone wants the famous Cat in the Hat, available at discount from our [Cat-alog](#), or make your own from red and white construction paper. A 39 oz. coffee can have a good diameter for the crown, and you can trace a large dinner plate for the brim. This makes a fun class project. There is also a pattern from "Craft Elf" at [www.craftelf.com/Craft\\_elf\\_sewing\\_felt\\_top\\_hat\\_sewing\\_instructions.htm](http://www.craftelf.com/Craft_elf_sewing_felt_top_hat_sewing_instructions.htm) that uses red and white felt; perhaps a parent volunteer would be willing to make these for your class.
- [Reproduce Certificates of Participation and Appreciation](#). Children love receiving tangible acknowledgement of their efforts, and your adult helpers will appreciate being thanked. You can download a pre-designed certificate from our [Materials](#) area, plus other fun things.
- Send information home to parents, along with [parent reading tips](#). Some parents may offer to help, and a few may volunteer to be guest readers.
- Let the world know about your plans by taking the [Pledge to Participate](#).
- If you're an NEA member, contact your Local Association and let them know about your plans. They may offer ideas and support.
- Explore this site fully for ideas and resources. There is a lot of information that will be useful if you want to expand on the basics.

- Put on your hats for the big day! Enjoy your guest readers. Eat birthday cake, drink punch, and don't forget to sing "Happy Birthday" to Dr. Seuss. *Read, read, read,* and have fun!

## Aspen Colorado



