

**Student Achievement Testing**

**1 The proposed amendment to the Colorado Revised Statutes:**

- 2           ♦       eliminates requirements for state standards and tests under the Colorado
- 3                       Student Assessment Program (CSAP);
- 4           ♦       replaces school report card ratings based on state tests with ratings based
- 5                       on tests selected by local school districts and teacher evaluations; and
- 6           ♦       eliminates or changes requirements for certain state programs that are
- 7                       currently based on state test scores.

**8 Background**

9                       *The Colorado Student Assessment Program and state standards.* Since the

10 1996-97 school year, Colorado public school students have taken state tests under the

11 Colorado Student Assessment Program (CSAP). The CSAP tests measure a student's

12 success in meeting subject-area standards set by the state. For the 2004-05 school year,

13 third through tenth grade students will take CSAP tests in three or four subject areas,

14 depending on their grade level. The subject areas tested include math, reading, writing,

15 and science. Eleventh grade students take a college entrance examination, the ACT test.

16 Table 1 indicates the CSAP tests for the 2004-05 school year.

17 **Table 1. CSAP Tests for the 2004-05 School Year**

18 Subject Area	19 Grade 3	Grade 4	Grade 5	Grade 6	Grade 7	Grade 8	Grade 9	Grade 10
20 Reading	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
21 Writing	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
22 Math	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓	✓
23 Science			*			✓		*

24 \* Beginning in 2005-06 school year

25 The proposal eliminates the CSAP tests, the ACT test requirement, and the

26 requirement for state standards. Instead, the proposal requires local school districts to

27 test and evaluate students. The proposal also eliminates a requirement that local school

28 districts have standards in 12 subject areas that meet or exceed the state standards.

1           **School report cards.** The state has issued school report cards since the 2000-01  
2 school year. These report cards rate schools based on CSAP test scores and provide  
3 information about how a school compares academically to nearby schools. Schools  
4 receive a rating of "excellent," "high," "average," "low," or "unsatisfactory" for overall  
5 academic performance, as well as a rating of academic growth based on CSAP scores.  
6 Report cards also describe school safety issues, student attendance, the school staff, and  
7 taxpayer information. Under the proposal, the school report cards will contain ratings  
8 based on local school district tests and evaluations by teachers, eliminating the ratings  
9 based on student CSAP scores.

10           **School improvement.** A school rating of "unsatisfactory" triggers a process for  
11 improving CSAP scores. If a school receives an "unsatisfactory" rating and then does  
12 not improve the rating the next year, the state may recommend that the school be  
13 converted to a charter school. The proposal changes the school improvement process.  
14 Rather than using school ratings based on CSAP scores, the process would be triggered  
15 using the new ratings based on local school district tests and teacher evaluations. In  
16 addition, the process would only begin after the school has received ratings lower than  
17 the ten nearest schools for three consecutive years.

18           **Criteria for other state programs.** Under the proposal, several state programs  
19 that use CSAP results to determine eligibility or compliance will instead use results of  
20 local school district tests. One example is state accreditation of school districts and  
21 schools. A second example is a state program for preschool students in neighborhoods  
22 with "low" or "unsatisfactory" schools. Under the proposal, the program must serve  
23 neighborhoods in which at least 70 percent of the students are from low-income families.

24           **Federal requirements.** The "No Child Left Behind Act of 2001" requires a state  
25 system of standards, testing, and reporting of results in order to receive federal funds.  
26 Under this law, by the 2005-06 school year, states must test all students in grades three  
27 through eight in math and reading. Students must also take tests in math and reading at  
28 least once during grades ten through twelve. Additionally, states must give tests in  
29 science at least once during grades three through five, six through nine, and ten through  
30 twelve by the 2007-08 school year. Colorado complies with the law through the CSAP  
31 program and plans to meet remaining federal testing requirements over the next two  
32 years.

### 33   **Arguments For**

34           1) The CSAP program labels students and schools. State tests put unnecessary  
35 pressure on students and assign ratings that are neither meaningful nor helpful. Too  
36 much emphasis is placed on the school ratings, which do not take into account  
37 differences in school populations. The negative labels assigned to students and schools  
38 under the CSAP program may impact most severely those students with the fewest social  
39 and economic advantages. The tests can have significant consequences for schools  
40 serving challenging populations, even if they are making progress that the state tests do  
41 not measure.

1           2) Having a statewide testing program with high stakes results in teachers  
2 "teaching to the test." The CSAP program has influenced and narrowed the curriculum  
3 taught in schools across the state. Subject areas not tested under CSAP, such as social  
4 studies or the arts, may not receive sufficient resources or attention. Additionally, the  
5 emphasis placed on the CSAP program means school personnel spend a great deal of the  
6 school year focusing on the tests. Educating Colorado's public school students should  
7 not center on test preparation.

8           3) State tests are expensive. Given the state's budget difficulties in recent years,  
9 the CSAP program is an unwise investment. The testing program is projected to cost the  
10 state approximately \$16 million next year and even includes tests that are not required  
11 under federal law. Furthermore, the tests only confirm what is already known — that  
12 favorable social and economic factors tend to result in higher test scores. Money spent  
13 on the CSAP program would be better spent on the local needs of students and teachers.

#### 14   **Arguments Against**

15           1) Colorado needs a consistent measure of student achievement across the state.  
16 The CSAP program provides teachers and parents with important tools to diagnose  
17 problem areas and to help students improve critical skills in reading, writing, math, and  
18 science. Moreover, the CSAP program sets expectations and standards for all students  
19 in Colorado, regardless of background or school district. Setting high expectations for  
20 students is the key to achievement. Without state requirements, there is no guarantee  
21 that those expectations would be communicated consistently across all school districts.

22           2) Current tests and standards meet federal requirements. In order to comply  
23 with the "No Child Left Behind Act" and receive millions of dollars in federal funds,  
24 Colorado is required to have a state testing system based on state standards.  
25 Discontinuing the CSAP program could have major consequences for education  
26 programs in Colorado. The state estimates that Colorado is eligible to receive over \$225  
27 million in "No Child Left Behind" funds for the next budget year. This is not the time to  
28 jeopardize sources of education funding. Colorado was among the first states to meet  
29 federal requirements; eliminating state tests and standards would be a step backward for  
30 education in Colorado.

31           3) State tests help provide accountability to the taxpayer. Funding for public  
32 schools accounts for about 43 percent of the state's budget and approximately half of all  
33 property taxes. The CSAP results and ratings give taxpayers an annual guide to the  
34 progress and achievement in the schools they are supporting. Moreover, eliminating  
35 CSAP tests may shift testing costs to local school districts.

#### 36   **Estimate of Fiscal Impact**