

**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 on teacher evaluations; and
- 6           ♦       for certain state programs using CSAP results, substitutes local school  
7                   district tests and teacher evaluations or family income.

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 19   Area	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 Under the proposal, the school report cards will contain ratings based on local school  
7 district tests and evaluations by teachers, eliminating the ratings based on student CSAP  
8 scores. Other descriptions in the report cards, such as school safety issues, student  
9 attendance, and the school staff, are not changed by the proposal.

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 how the school improvement  
14 process is triggered. Rather than using school ratings based on CSAP scores, the  
15 process would be triggered using the new ratings based on local school district tests and  
16 teacher evaluations. In addition, the process would only begin after the school has  
17 received ratings lower than the ten nearest schools for three consecutive years.

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

## 27    **Arguments For**

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

36           2) Having a high-profile statewide testing program results in teachers "teaching  
37 to the test." The CSAP program has influenced the curriculum taught in schools across  
38 the state. Subject areas not tested under CSAP, such as social studies or the arts, may  
39 not receive sufficient resources or attention. Additionally, the emphasis placed on the  
40 CSAP program means school personnel spend a great deal of the school year focusing

1 on the tests. Educating Colorado's public school students should not center on test  
2 preparation.

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

## 9 **Arguments Against**

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

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

25 3) State tests help provide accountability to the taxpayer. Funding for public  
26 schools accounts for about 43 percent of the state's budget and approximately half of all  
27 property taxes. The CSAP results and ratings give taxpayers an annual guide to the  
28 progress and achievement in the schools they are supporting and enable parents to see  
29 how their child's school compares to other schools. Moreover, eliminating CSAP tests  
30 may shift testing costs to local school districts.

## 31 **Estimate of Fiscal Impact**

32 Not available at this time.