



BELIEVE **IN**
BETTER **A**
COLORADO

April 2008

stakeholder conversations

T O O L K I T

A publication for the members of:

Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB) • Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) • Colorado Education Association (CEA)

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BELIEVE **N**
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introduction

how to use this tool kit

Who is it for?

This stakeholder conversations tool kit is designed for school district teams – superintendents, school board presidents and local association presidents – that have been communicating regularly with employees and school board members and are ready for next steps.

Phase two: Stakeholder conversations

Phase two of *Believe in a Better Colorado* begins with district teams hosting conversations with small groups of stakeholders, such as leaders of parent organizations, business leaders, higher education officials and public service providers in their communities such as transportation and health care leaders.

This strategy is similar to how districts build support for bond and mill levy elections: Start with the “family” (our own employees and school board members), move to small groups of community stakeholders and then target the broader public. Broader community outreach efforts would occur after districts hold stakeholder conversations.

Our goals are to be purposeful and strategic about how we move forward, keep the work manageable for district teams and build a chorus of supporters calling for changes in Colorado’s tax structure.

Getting started

Modeling the Colorado Association of School Boards (CASB), Colorado Association of School Executives (CASE) and Colorado Education Association (CEA) alliance, please work as a team to share the *Believe in a Better Colorado* messages in this tool kit with stakeholders and gather feedback that can inform how we take the message to the broader public.

Inside this tool kit, you will find tips for organizing and hosting small-group stakeholder conversations, a sample agenda, suggested talking points and handouts.

In response to requests from district teams, we also have included more detailed data about essential public services and updated key messages and talking points, answers to frequently asked questions about *Believe in a Better Colorado*, and tips for public speaking and dealing with pushback. (See the table of contents on page 1.)

Believe in a Better Colorado arguably is the most important venture our three organizations will launch for the future of public education in Colorado, and it cannot be done without your leadership at the local level. Thank you in advance for helping to lead our state toward a better future.

Ken DeLay, executive director, CASB
John Hefty, executive director, CASE
David DuVall, executive director, CEA

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continuing internal communications

Employees and school board members are lead communicators – a cadre of people who can speak accurately and firsthand about the schools where they work.

Believe in a Better Colorado's success hinges on making sure employees and school board members are well-informed and can speak with one voice about the need for changes to our tax structure.

Considering that more than 97,000 people work full time for Colorado's public schools – serving almost 800,000 students – K-12 education has a wealth of ambassadors.

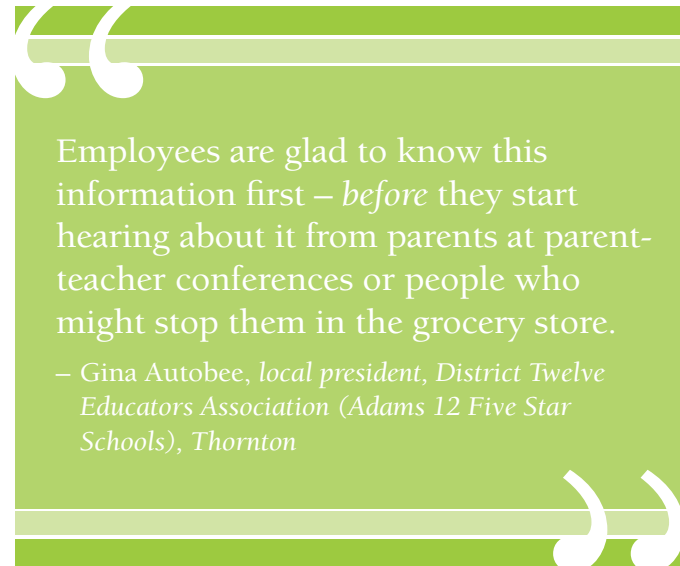
School employees are the best investment you can make in your communications efforts. Involve them, train them and inform them. Don't leave them behind! They are the people your community trusts most for credible information about schools – followed by students themselves, parents and then media.

Simple strategies

- Place the *Believe in a Better Colorado* handout from this tool kit in workrooms and employee lounges.
- Include regular mentions in employee print and electronic newsletters and intranet notices. (CASB, CASE and CEA will provide ready-to-use monthly blurbs.)
- Begin staff meetings by citing a statistic and encouraging employees to visit the Web site (www.believeinabettercolorado.org).
- Show the brief *Believe in a Better Colorado* DVD to staff and board members.

Repetition is a communications strategy

The way to make a lasting impression is to repeat, repeat, repeat. People need to hear a message nine to 12 times before it sinks in. Are you repeating these messages in multiple ways over time? You have lots of tools at your fingertips. Visit www.believeinabettercolorado.org, which is updated regularly, for ideas.



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stakeholder conversations

hosting small-group stakeholder conversations

If we're not careful, we're going to see lots of little ballot initiatives that invest in each service individually. We need to get together collectively to make sure all of us are funded.

– Jane Barnes, board president, CASB, and board member, Jefferson County Public Schools

Phase two of *Believe in a Better Colorado* begins with district teams hosting one-hour conversations with small groups of key stakeholders, such as leaders of parent organizations, business leaders, higher education officials and public service providers in their communities such as transportation and health care leaders.

This strategy is similar to how districts build support for bond and mill levy elections: Start with the “family” (our own employees and school board members), move to small groups of community stakeholders and then target the broader public. Broader community outreach efforts would occur after districts hold stakeholder conversations.

The materials in this tool kit can be customized for shorter or longer meetings. Whatever their length, these meetings should be conversational and engaging – more of a dialogue and less of a presentation.

Step-by-step checklist

Four weeks out

- Select a time, date and location.
- Confirm a room to accommodate setup for a small-group discussion, including a DVD player and TV.

- Determine district team participants (superintendent, board president and local association president).
- Discuss suggested meeting agenda with other team members and customize as needed.
- Call or email 15 to 20 stakeholders to invite them to the meeting.
- Secure a *Believe in a Better Colorado* DVD. (If you don't already have a copy, request one from Schoolhouse Communications, 303-549-1778, or tanya@believeinabettercolorado.org.)

One week out

- Email a reminder notice, driving and parking directions, and an outline of the agenda to participants.
- Arrange for refreshments and meeting supplies.
- Make copies of the agenda, handouts and sign-up form. (See the “Meeting handouts” section in this tool kit.)
- Print a table-top name tent identifying each participant.

Day of meeting

- Post a front door sign identifying the meeting and room location.
- Set up the room (tables and chairs, name tents, refreshments, TV, etc.).
- After meeting, collect sign-up forms. (See the “Meeting handouts” section in this tool kit.)
- Complete a feedback form. (See the “Resources” section in this tool kit.)

Next day

- Submit feedback form and sign-up forms per directions on forms.
- Review with school district participants what worked and what can be improved for next time.
- Send a thank-you letter or email to those who attended, and encourage them to visit www.believeinabettercolorado.org.

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selecting participants for small-group stakeholder conversations

If you invite 15 to 20 stakeholders, small-group conversations might include about a dozen individuals who are able to attend. We suggest limiting the meetings to 12 people to allow ample time for everyone to speak.

You might organize some of these conversations during existing meetings on those groups' turfs, such as a scheduled PTA/PTO meeting. For other stand-alone meetings, you might mix attendees to get broad-based views, such as inviting transportation, higher education and health care leaders to the same meeting. If you experience trouble attracting attendance, try this "Plan B" option: Schedule one-on-one phone calls with individual leaders to begin to share the message.

Consider inviting executive directors and board members from the following kinds of stakeholder groups:

School districts

- Advisory groups (for example, school district accountability and financial oversight committees)
- Civic organizations (for example, Kiwanis, Optimists and Rotary)
- Education foundations and associations
- Chambers of commerce and other similar business groups
- Faith-based organizations
- Early childhood providers
- Youth organizations (for example, Boys & Girls Club, after-school providers)
- School district key communicators: opinion leaders who have credibility, speak accurately about the school district, correct misinformation, keep in touch with school officials, and immediately report misperceptions and inaccuracies
- Parents
- Retired employees
- Student councils

Higher education

- Colleges and universities
- Vocational and trade programs

Health care and safety

- Emergency medical services
- Hospitals
- Services for people with developmental disabilities
- Social services (for example, public assistance, child welfare, mental health and victim assistance services)
- State and veterans' nursing homes
- Mental health providers
- Fire departments
- Police and sheriff departments

City and county governments

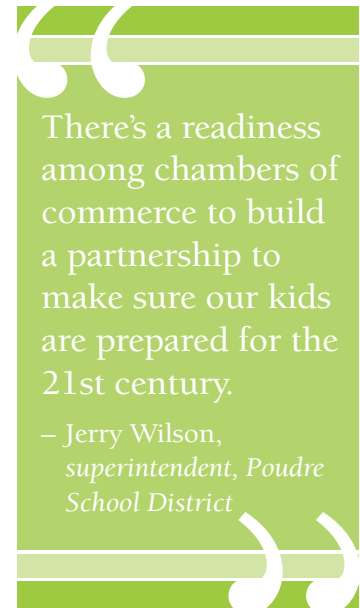
- County commissioners
- City council members
- District attorneys
- Intergovernmental consortiums (for example, the Denver Regional Council of Governments, or DRCOG)

Transportation

- Roads and mass transit services
- Local/regional Department of Transportation directors
- Local representatives of the Colorado Contractors Association

Corrections

- Juvenile corrections system
- Prisons



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inviting participants to small-group stakeholder conversations

Consider personally inviting participants with a phone call and following up with an email to ensure maximum participation. Here is a suggested invitation and follow-up note to use when contacting participants:

Sample invitation

Please join us from [X-X time] on [day, date] at [location] for a conversation about Colorado's essential public services. We would like to introduce you to *Believe in a Better Colorado*, an initiative to inform public school employees and citizens about the need to more effectively invest in essential public services – such as K-12 education, colleges and universities, health care, social services and roads.

The ultimate goal is to adopt a new tax system by 2011 – the same year today's high school freshmen will graduate.

Colorado's investments in all essential public services are below national averages. Projected state revenues show that at best, Colorado has only enough money to provide 2007 levels of service.

The “perfect storm” will hit in 2011, when the Referendum C time-out ends, the Amendment 23 funding shrinks, but TABOR spending limits remain.

The solution must come from a shared effort among Colorado citizens. Executive directors of the state's three largest education organizations are meeting with leaders across the state representing business, health care, transportation and other stakeholder groups to build a broad coalition that can work on tax reform.

In the meantime, we would like to talk with you about collectively making sure that all of us are funded. Please let us know by [date] whether you can attend this conversation by calling [phone number] or emailing [address].

[name, title, school district]

Sample follow-up note

Thank you for making time to participate in our recent conversation about *Believe in a Better Colorado*. It was a rich discussion, and I will forward feedback to the Colorado Association of School Boards, Colorado Association of School Executives and Colorado Education Association as they work toward next steps.

If you haven't already, I encourage you to submit the sign-up form you received at our meeting to begin receiving periodic email updates about *Believe in a Better Colorado*. You also can sign up at www.believeinabettercolorado.org.

Again, thanks. Feel free to contact me if I can provide additional information.

[name, title, school district]

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facilitating small-group stakeholder conversations

Depending on the meeting's length and the audience's depth of knowledge, consider using the following suggested one-hour meeting outline and talking points – and the agenda handout on page 23 in this tool kit.

Use your discretion in selecting data and information most appropriate to the audience. (See the “Resources” section in this tool kit.) Include local data and anecdotes to make the presentation more relevant to your community.

- **Welcome and introductions** (5 to 10 minutes)

- Thanks for joining us today for a conversation about how Colorado invests in essential public services. [*Introduce yourself and ask others to do the same.*]
- To set the stage, I'd like to begin by playing a DVD. Then we'd like to briefly talk about the *Believe in a Better Colorado* initiative before moving into our conversation.
- Before I start the DVD, I want to clarify that it was produced last year. Some of the rankings and statistics have changed a bit based on newer data released by the U.S. Census Bureau. The bottom line, though, remains unchanged: Colorado funds *all* of its essential public services below national averages.

- **DVD presentation** (6.5 minutes)

- **About Believe in a Better Colorado** (5 minutes)

- As you just saw, *Believe in a Better Colorado* is an unprecedented partnership among the state's three largest education associations representing about 40,000 educators.
- We started last year to educate our employees and school board members about the need to invest in essential public services without unfairly taxing citizens.
- Our next step is to begin building a chorus of supporters, so we're hosting conversations with district stakeholders and other essential public services providers in our community.
- The DVD we just played obviously is geared toward an education audience. It's what we used to help educate our own employees.
- But the initiative is about investing in all of Colorado's essential public services.
- Right now, Colorado's investments in all essential public services are below national averages. Below average is not good enough.
- For K-12 education, Colorado invests about \$1,000 per pupil less than the national average. For our district, that equates to \$X we could invest, but are not.
- At best, Colorado has only enough money to provide 2007 levels of service. This is not what we want as Colorado grows.
- Our three education organizations are meeting with leaders across the state representing business, health care, transportation and other stakeholder groups to build a broad coalition that can work on tax reform.
- In the meantime, we'd like to talk with you.

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facilitating small-group stakeholder conversations, *continued*

- **Group discussion** (30 to 45 minutes)

1. What are your general reactions?
2. What kinds of investments should we be making now in education, roads, higher education, health care and other public services that we currently are not? *[Probe for examples in public services where Colorado is falling behind and needs are not being met.]*
3. Let's talk more about Colorado's future. What does "believing in a better Colorado" look like to you? What does "believing in a better Colorado" mean to you? *[For example, we have a skilled work force prepared for global competition; all of our children are insured; etc.]*
4. What would you be willing to do to help spread the word about this initiative?

- **Wrap-up** (5 minutes)

- Thanks for sharing your ideas today.
- If Colorado continues what we're doing right now, we're going to see lots of specific ballot initiatives that invest in only individual public services.
- We need to collectively make sure that all of us are funded.
- We believe in a better Colorado.
- We encourage you to fill out the sign-up form if you'd like to get email updates about our work.
- We also encourage you to spread the word that Colorado's investments in all essential public services are below national averages – and that we need a different tax structure to fix that.
- Feel free to refer people to www.believeinabettercolorado.org for information.

How did it go?

Please forward your successes and challenges by submitting the feedback form on page 21 in this tool kit. You can also find the feedback form online at www.believeinabettercolorado.org.

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resources

key messages and talking points

Based on input from district teams that participated in phase one of *Believe in a Better Colorado*, we have developed the following messages to use as you continue to communicate internally and also move the discussion into your community.

The messages focus on the status of Colorado's investments in essential public services; Colorado's conflicting constitutional mandates; and the condition of Colorado's K-12 education investment.

Strategic messages with talking points should be repeated in every opportunity such as presentations, meetings and one-on-one conversations.

While the three messages should be used regularly and consistently, please do not feel as if you must repeat every talking point in meetings or presentations. Instead, pick and choose the talking points that will appeal most to your audience. Customize them with examples, stories and compelling data specific to your community. Think about what will connect most with your audience. For ideas about localizing messages, see page 15.

Message one

Colorado's investments in all essential public services are below national averages.

- Below average is not good enough.
- It's our responsibility to create the future we want for ourselves and for our children.
- That means taking care of public structures, services and programs that contribute to our quality of life – public schools, roads and health care, to name a few.
- Colorado is a wealthy state. We rank eighth in the country in per capita income. Yet, our taxes are among the lowest in the nation – including residential and business property tax, state and local taxes, and sales tax.
- Colorado also has the second-lowest residential property tax burden and fourth-lowest business tax burden.
- Colorado invests about \$1,000 per K-12 student less than the national average. Four of Colorado's neighboring states invest more per pupil. Most impressive is Wyoming, investing over \$3,000 more per pupil than Colorado.
- Not only will projected state revenues not be enough to maintain state buildings, roads and bridges in their current condition, they also will not be enough to pay for any new or expanded services to accommodate growth.

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key messages and talking points, *continued*

Message two

Our investment in the state's future is shrinking.

- The 1992 constitutional amendment TABOR keeps us from meeting Colorado's growing needs.
- Instead, Colorado should have a tax system that is fair to taxpayers and raises enough money to invest properly in citizens' needs.
- When we attempt to address a specific problem with a single-issue constitutional amendment, like TABOR, we create unintended consequences.
- For example, Amendment 23 supporters never intended to invest in K-12 education at the expense of investing in higher education. But that's what happened when Amendment 23, the TABOR amendment and an economic downturn occurred earlier this decade.
- It's also unlikely that people who supported the Gallagher amendment intended to burden businesses that create Colorado's jobs. But Gallagher continues to load more property taxes onto businesses.
- The "perfect storm" will hit in 2011, when the Referendum C time-out ends, Amendment 23 funding shrinks, but TABOR spending limits remain.
- We're backed into a corner. At best, Colorado has only enough money to provide 2007 levels of service.
- We need a different tax structure by 2011. The solution must come from a shared effort among Colorado citizens.

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key messages and talking points, *continued*

Message three

Education is the best investment Colorado can make.

- Research ties the quality of education to a community's quality of life.
- Almost 800,000 students are enrolled in Colorado's public schools in nearly 180 school districts.
- Today's students will have up to 14 different jobs by the time they're 40, according to the U.S. Department of Labor. They'll work with technology that has not been invented yet. In fact, many of today's college majors didn't exist 10 years ago. Today's teachers are preparing students for jobs that don't exist right now.
- Schools are doing more now than ever before. To meet the federal mandate that students achieve 100 percent proficiency in subjects like math and reading by 2013, schools are investing more to serve an increasing number of Colorado students who are overcoming poverty, language barriers and special needs.
- And, Gov. Bill Ritter wants schools to cut the dropout rate in half in a decade and double the number of college degrees and certificates awarded in Colorado.
- The reality is that daily life in Colorado and around the world – from big cities to small rural areas – requires technological know-how, higher-level thinking and advanced reasoning ability.
- Tomorrow's employees must solve increasingly complex problems, communicate effectively using a variety of media, work in teams to create and innovate – and continually adapt to rapid change throughout their lifetime.
- The good news is that Colorado has the second highest percentage of college graduates in the nation. The not-so-good news is that we rank 32nd in sending our own high school graduates to college.
- That's important because over time, more jobs will require education beyond high school.
- Research shows that a college education yields important social and economic benefits.
- In fact, those with a bachelor's degree earn almost \$1 million more than high school graduates over a lifetime.
- From preschool through college, our public schools must graduate more workers with the know-how to participate in our changing economy.

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customizing messages

Tips to customize messages for your community:

- Colorado invests on average \$7,939 per pupil, which is \$1,034 per pupil less than the national average. Multiply your total student enrollment by \$1,034 to illustrate what you're missing. Create a picture. How many additional teachers could that fund? How many computers could that buy, etc.?
- Amendment 23 funding shrinks in 2011. K-12 funding is slated to continue to increase by the rate of inflation – not by inflation *plus 1 percent*. What could that 1 percent loss in investment mean to your district?
- Four of Colorado's neighboring states invest more per pupil. Most impressive is Wyoming, investing \$3,187 more per pupil than Colorado. If your district invested at Wyoming's levels, what additional educational opportunities would your district be able to provide?
- Schools are doing more than ever before. To meet the federal No Child Left Behind mandate that students achieve 100 percent proficiency by 2013, they are investing more to serve an increasing number of Colorado students who are overcoming poverty, language barriers and special needs. In the past five years, how has your student population changed to include more students learning English or those who qualify for free or reduced price lunch?

Suggestions to customize messages for specific audiences:

- Agricultural and ranching industries: getting their products to market; roads; fair taxes; workers needing higher-level skills, even if they don't attend college
- Business: smart, prepared work force for the changing economy; fair taxes
- Classified K-12 staff: examples of funding changes they have seen in their schools
- Community organizations: a focus on what is best for the common good
- Community members: schools are meeting more needs than ever before; good schools mean good property values; fair taxes
- Democratic leaders: a focus on the common good; fair taxes
- Republican leaders: efficiency; fair taxes
- Parents: preparing children for success in the world in which they will work
- Second homeowners: good schools mean good property values
- Senior citizens and retirees: preparing their grandchildren for success in the world in which they will work; teaching character education, work ethic; better managing the increasing costs of health care and Medicaid; good schools mean good property values
- Teachers: classroom impact of changing student demographics

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data

About Colorado's essential public services

Colorado's schools, colleges and universities, health care safety net, human services programs, prisons and transportation system all depend on General Fund revenues for much of their funding. Together they account for more than 80 percent of total state investments.

Not only will projected state revenues not be enough to maintain state buildings, roads and bridges in their current condition, they also will not be enough to pay for any new or expanded services to accommodate growth.

Colorado lags behind other states in investing in many smaller but equally important programs, such as state courts, environmental regulation, services for the developmentally disabled, public safety and services for veterans.

K-12 education

Almost 800,000 students are enrolled in Colorado's public schools in nearly 180 school districts. Various calculations rank Colorado between 37th and 49th in investment in public education. The most recent data show:

- Colorado average per pupil investment: \$7,939
- U.S. average per pupil investment: \$8,973
- Difference: -\$1,034
- Four of Colorado's neighboring states invest more per pupil
 - Kansas: \$923 more
 - Nebraska: \$1,991 more
 - New Mexico: \$492 more
 - Wyoming: \$3,187 more

Source: Education Week, *Quality Counts 2008*

Needs: An analysis by the Colorado School Finance Project forecasts that we will need an additional \$2.9 billion annually to adequately invest in our public schools. That's just for academics, not for maintaining or building facilities. What is eye-opening is that if Colorado were to spend per student what Wyoming currently spends per student, our state basically would meet the projected \$2.9 billion obligation.

Source: Colorado School Finance Project

Higher education

Colorado's investment in postsecondary education is well below the U.S. average.

Source: *2008 Toward a More Competitive Colorado*, Metro Denver Economic Development Corporation

Needs: Compared to a representative group of peer institutions in other states, Colorado's colleges and universities as a whole receive just 64 percent of average funding, according to an independent study done for the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. Providing Colorado institutions with the average level of support would require an additional \$832 million investment each year.

Source: *Looking Forward: Colorado's Fiscal Prospects After Ref C*, December 2007, Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, The Bell Policy Center, Colorado Children's Campaign

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data, continued

Health care

The cost of health insurance is escalating rapidly. About one-fifth of our population is uninsured.

- Coloradoans without insurance: estimated 792,000
 - 17 percent of our population – nearly one-fifth – is uninsured.
 - 70 percent are in the work force or dependents of a worker.
 - About 40 percent are young adults ages 19 to 34.
 - Almost 20 percent are children.
 - 57 percent are white.
- Uninsured found in all income groups
 - 32 percent have family incomes of \$20,000 or less annually
 - 75 percent have family incomes of \$50,000 or less annually
 - 13 percent have family incomes of \$75,000 or more annually
 - 6.5 percent have family incomes of \$100,000 or more annually

Source: Blue Ribbon Commission for Healthcare Reform, Final Report to the General Assembly, Jan. 31, 2008

Needs: According to an independent actuarial review, the fiscal impact of health care options would vary widely, but the investment could range from \$389 million to well over \$1 billion a year.

Source: *Looking Forward: Colorado's Fiscal Prospects After Ref C*, December 2007, Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, The Bell Policy Center, Colorado Children's Campaign

Transportation

Transportation revenue is not keeping pace with inflation, and construction costs continue to rise. Colorado's gasoline tax, the primary source of transportation funding, has not increased in 17 years. Since 1992, TABOR has prevented state lawmakers from raising taxes to keep pace with construction-cost inflation, which has averaged 6.4 percent per year since 1992. Keeping up with inflation would have required a penny-and-a-half increase in the gas tax per year. At current investment levels, fewer than 40 percent of state roads will be in good or fair condition by 2016.

Without increased investment, it will not be possible to maintain the current surface condition of state roads. Today, if you drive an hour on an average stretch of highway, you will spend 20 minutes on rough pavement. By 2016, you will spend 40 minutes of every hour on rough pavement. This takes a toll on your car. It is also bad for state finances – roads and bridges that are not maintained today will cost more to repair tomorrow.

Source: Colorado Transportation Finance and Implementation Panel, A Report to Colorado, January 2008

Needs: The Department of Transportation estimates the state needs up to \$2.6 billion more than its current annual investment of approximately \$1.1 billion.

Source: *Looking Forward: Colorado's Fiscal Prospects After Ref C*, December 2007, Colorado Fiscal Policy Institute, The Bell Policy Center, Colorado Children's Campaign

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speaking publicly

Whether you are hosting a small-group conversation or making a presentation to a larger group, being prepared and having control of your message are prerequisites for establishing a connection with people. Here are some tips for public speaking:

- ✓ **Know your material.**
Use humor, personal stories and conversational language – that way you won't easily forget what to say.
- ✓ **Know the room.**
Arrive early, walk around the speaking area and practice using the microphone and any visual aids.
- ✓ **Know the audience.**
Greet people as they arrive. Work the room. It's easier to speak to a group of friends than to strangers.
- ✓ **Relax.**
Begin by addressing the audience. It buys you time and calms your nerves. Pause, smile and count to three before saying anything.
- ✓ **Realize that people want you to succeed.**
Audiences want you to be interesting, stimulating, informative and entertaining. They're rooting for you. Visualize the audience clapping – it will boost your confidence.
- ✓ **Start with eye contact.**
Don't just pass your gaze throughout the room; try to focus on individual listeners and create a bond with them by looking directly in their eyes for 5 to 10 seconds.
- ✓ **Smile.**
- ✓ **Stay true to your personality.**
Respond naturally to what you feel and say.
- ✓ **Vary your speaking position.**
Move from one spot to another as you highlight different points.

Source: Toastmasters International

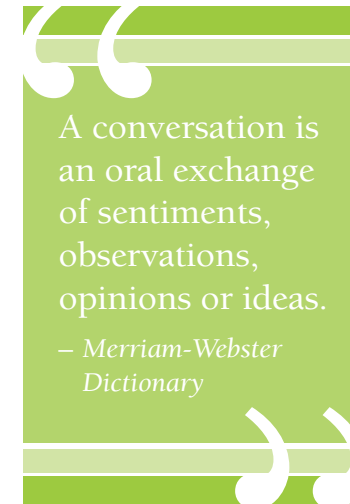
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dealing with pushback

When things go awry, what you can control is your reaction. Do expect to hear some pushback from staff, stakeholders and the community during conversations about *Believe in a Better Colorado*. However, it is our experience that limiting the number of meeting participants to 12 people leads to a richer, more in-depth conversation and minimizes grandstanding. Consider both the positive reactions and the criticisms.

While it is difficult to respond positively to people who are in attack mode, you can respectfully neutralize the situation without letting them dominate the conversation:

- Listen.
- Show empathy.
- Acknowledge their concern.
- Ask questions to get to the heart of their concern.
- Accept that there may be some truth in what they are saying.
- Don't get defensive.
- Ask to hear from others who haven't had a chance to speak or who may have opinions different from those of the critic.
- Say what you can and will do.
- Follow up, if appropriate.
- Remember, you don't have all the answers.
- Stay focused on the overall conversation.



frequently asked questions about *Believe in a Better Colorado*

Are there legal parameters school districts should consider before sharing information about *Believe in a Better Colorado*?

Believe in a Better Colorado is a multiyear education effort to inform public school employees and citizens about Colorado's tax policy and the need to more effectively invest in essential public services. School districts and district employees do not violate state or federal laws by educating employees and citizens about the complexity of Colorado's current tax system – and about the choices facing citizens who want to improve investment in public schools and other state services.

How does *Believe in a Better Colorado* impact local school districts' plans for bond issues and mill levies?

Local elections make up for a lack in state investment. It is important to help people understand the difference between local bond and mill levy elections that provide additional investment from residents for their own school districts – and *Believe in a Better Colorado*, which is a statewide, multiyear initiative to inform public school employees and citizens about the need to take a more long-term approach to invest effectively in all essential public services. Here's a way to frame this situation: Local elections make things a little better; changing the tax structure statewide could make things a lot better and eliminate having to run continual local elections.

What is the solution to fixing Colorado's tax system?

Because the tax code is locked into the state constitution, it will take a citizen vote to change it. We don't know yet what the fix is, but CASB, CASE and CEA are working together with the business community, elected officials and public service leaders to figure out how to invest responsibly in essential public services for all Colorado citizens. They are working toward creating a broad coalition that will propose solutions. Members of the coalition will include those from the business community, elected officials and leaders representing other essential public services such as university presidents and hospital directors. The goal is for Colorado voters to change the way the state invests in essential services – before 2011. We will keep district teams well-informed as this work moves forward.

www.believeinabettercolorado.org



feedback form

School district name _____

Contact person/title _____

Email address _____

Phone number _____

Group/audience _____

Meeting date _____

How are your conversations about *Believe in a Better Colorado* going? Please share your successes and challenges. Forward questions. Ask for help.

1. What reactions did you hear? _____

2. What questions were raised? _____

3. What additional data or resources would have been helpful?

4. What advice would you give to CASB, CASE and CEA for taking the *Believe in a Better Colorado* message to the broader community?

Complete this form and fax a copy toll-free to Tanya Caughey, Schoolhouse Communications, at 1-866-670-4359.
Need additional help? Email tanya@believeinabettercolorado.org or call 303-549-1778.

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meeting handouts

meeting agenda

[Please insert date of meeting, location and time.]

- Welcome and introductions
- DVD presentation
- About *Believe in a Better Colorado*
- Group discussion
 - What are your general reactions?
 - What kinds of investments should we be making now in education, roads, higher education, health care and other public services that we currently are not?
 - What does “believing in a better Colorado” mean to you? What kind of Colorado do you want for your children’s or grandchildren’s futures?
 - What would you be willing to do to help spread the word about this initiative?
- Wrap-up

Handouts

About *Believe in a Better Colorado*
School finance basics
Sign-up form



about *Believe in a Better Colorado*

Believe in a Better Colorado is an unprecedented alliance among the state's three largest K-12 education associations. The initiative is informing public school employees and citizens about the need to more effectively invest in essential public services – such as K-12 and higher education, health care and transportation. The ultimate goal is to adopt a new tax system by 2011. Efforts are under way to build a broad coalition representing business, health care, transportation and other stakeholder groups to work on tax reform.

Colorado's investments in *all* essential public services are below national averages. Below average is not good enough. It is our responsibility to create the future we want for ourselves and for our children. Colorado is a wealthy state. We rank eighth in the country in per capita income. Our taxes are among the lowest in the nation, yet Colorado invests \$1,034 per student less in K-12 schools than the national average. If Colorado were to invest per student like Wyoming *already* does, our state basically would meet the additional \$2.9 billion annually that the Colorado School Finance Project has forecast to be an adequate investment in public schools – not including maintaining or building facilities.

Our investment in the state's future is shrinking. TABOR, the 1992 constitutional amendment, keeps us from meeting Colorado's growing needs. Instead, Colorado should have a tax system that is fair to taxpayers and raises enough money to invest properly in citizens' needs. The "perfect storm" will hit in 2011, when the Referendum C time-out ends, Amendment 23 funding shrinks, but TABOR spending limits remain. At best, Colorado has only enough money to provide 2007 levels of service. This is not what we want as Colorado grows.

Education is the best investment Colorado can make. Research ties the quality of education to a community's quality of life. An educated and skilled local work force attracts jobs, improves productivity, creates a larger tax base and adds wealth to our communities. Colorado has the second highest percentage of college graduates in the nation, but we rank 32nd in sending our *own* high school graduates to college. That is important because over time, more jobs will require education beyond high school. Tomorrow's employees need to solve increasingly complex problems, communicate effectively using a variety of media, work in teams to create and innovate, and continually adapt to rapid change.

To make Colorado a land of opportunity for all in the 21st century, we have to start with education. Our top priority must be preparing our kids to be good citizens and to compete and prosper in a global economy. Everything builds on this foundation. If we fail in this, nothing else we do will matter much.

– The Bell Policy Center, 2006 *Blueprint for Opportunity*

For more data and information, visit www.believeinabettercolorado.org.

Colorado Association of School Boards
Colorado Association of School Executives
Colorado Education Association

www.believeinabettercolorado.org



school finance basics

Public school investment in Colorado

Colorado invests in K-12 public schools through a combination of local property taxes and state revenues. Historically, local property taxes made up the majority of funding. However, since property taxes decrease and will continue to do so based on the impact of the constitutional Gallagher amendment, the state has been required to fill in the amount that local property taxes used to cover.

Amendment 23

Amendment 23 was passed by voters in 2000 to reverse a decade of budget cuts experienced by Colorado school districts throughout the 1990s. During that decade, Colorado's education investments did not keep pace with the inflation rate. Per-pupil investment in education was (and still is) well below the national average. Amendment 23 requires the state's K-12 investment to increase by the rate of inflation plus 1 percent from 2001 to 2011 and by inflation after that. It is intended to bring K-12 investment closer to the national average. Yet if Amendment 23 is honored through 2011, the state essentially will invest as much per child in real dollars as it did in 1989.

Gallagher amendment

The Gallagher amendment, passed in 1982, was designed to maintain a constant ratio between the property tax revenue that comes from residential and business property. To simplify a set of very confusing formulas, the effect of Gallagher was to reduce the assessment rate (the percent of property value that is subject to taxation) whenever statewide total residential property values increased faster than business property values. As a result, the assessment rate for residential property has declined by more than two-thirds over the years because of Colorado's population growth and because of increases in real estate values. (Colorado now has among the lowest residential property tax rates in the country.)

TABOR

TABOR is the Taxpayer Bill of Rights, passed in 1992. TABOR prohibits any tax increase without a vote of the people. It places the strictest limits in the nation on how much revenue the state can keep and how much it can invest. Under TABOR, the state can increase operating expenses by just 6 percent from one year to the next. Any revenue collected in excess of TABOR's revenue limits must be refunded to the taxpayers. (This provision of TABOR has been suspended at the state level until 2011 as a result of the passage of Referendum C.)

Referendum C

The downturn in the economy from 2001 to 2003 required deep cuts in essential state services that already had been pared down. Because TABOR prevents the state from investing more than 6 percent of what it did the previous year, the state cannot restore cut services to pre-economic downturn levels once the economy begins improving. In response, a bipartisan coalition referred Referendum C to the ballot, and Colorado voters approved it in 2005. It is basically a five-year time-out from TABOR's annual state revenue collection and investment limits. Had Referendum C not passed, the state would have been forced to make deep cuts at the same time it refunded hundreds of millions of dollars to taxpayers. During this five-year Referendum C time-out from TABOR, the state is allowed to keep all the revenue it brings in from Colorado's tax rates (already among the lowest in the nation). That allows the state to fully invest the minimum increase to K-12 education as required by Amendment 23. In 2011, TABOR's strictest-in-the-nation revenue limits will be put in place again.

Source: Great Education Colorado

www.believeinabettercolorado.org



sign-up form

Yes! Sign me up to receive periodic email updates about *Believe in a Better Colorado*.

Name _____

Title _____

Mailing address _____

Email address _____

Phone number _____

Home school district _____

When we move to the “solutions” phase, and there’s an action plan, may we contact you to help us spread the word?

- Yes.
- No, thanks.

Complete this form and fax a copy toll-free to Tanya Caughey, Schoolhouse Communications, at 1-866-670-4359. Need additional help? Email tanya@believeinabettercolorado.org or call 303-549-1778.

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The *Believe in a Better Colorado* initiative is underwritten by the Colorado School Finance Project, a nonprofit organization that collects and distributes research-based information and data about topics related to school finance.

Credit: Schoolhouse Communications

