

*The following are the prepared remarks of South Dakota Secretary of Education Melody Schopp's State of the States Address at CCSSO's 2017 Legislative Conference on March 20, 2017. Schopp is President of the CCSSO Board of Directors. Actual remarks may vary upon delivery.*

Let me begin by offering a warm welcome and my personal thanks to each and every state school chief who made the trip to be here today. I want you all to know how much I appreciate your presence — not just here in the audience today, but your presence every day, as leaders in education, and champions for what's best for children in your own states. You are a big part of why I consider my new role as CCSSO president such a privilege, and such a responsibility. It's a privilege because of the difference your leadership and dedication make in the lives of millions of children across this country.

A lot has changed in Washington D.C. and our federal politics, but this organization continues to stand for children and the leaders in this room continue to advocate and work and lead on behalf of all children. And precisely because what you do touches the lives of so many students, I consider one of my foremost responsibilities to be doing whatever I can to support your work. I feel equally responsible to do whatever I can to lift that work up, both so that we can learn from each other and so that more people — from state and federal legislators, to policymakers, to educators, to parents — come to appreciate CCSSO for the incredible, effective and vital organization that it is. So in the time that I have today, I will take just a few minutes to give you a sense of my priorities and what I'd like to focus on during my tenure as CCSSO president.

But before I do that, I want to spend some time talking about some of the incredible leadership and innovation in education that is already happening in so many of your states, and through CCSSO. Because every person in this room feels the responsibility, every day, for the young people in classrooms across our states. And that responsibility can weigh heavy, so it is important to take a step back sometimes to appreciate the strong work and successes that are happening to help all of our kids succeed. In my experience, one of the keys to success is to keep it simple. When we lead by listening; holding ourselves and others accountable; striving to be fair and just; staying the course and remaining consistent; and by making sure students and teachers have the tools they need to succeed — good things happen.

So I want to start by recognizing the truly inspiring amount and variety of cross-collaboration you have helped foster and promote between your SEAs and so many other actors, from educators, to the business community, to the public, to teacher preparation programs, just to name a few, who all have a stake in ensuring students in our public schools can go through life reaping the benefits of a high-quality education. One area where this kind of collaboration was an absolute necessity, and where you have met that need with creativity and integrity, is around states' work to begin tackling how best to leverage the opportunities that ESSA will present. Many of your states have engaged in efforts to strongly connect with — and listen to — your communities. This isn't a new idea by any stretch, but it also doesn't just happen — it takes hard work and diligent follow up to have meaningful and authentic outreach. And the outreach to stakeholders that many of your states have conducted have provided just this kind of vital opportunity — for meaningful and authentic two-way conversations between your SEAs and local communities, about how best to support students.

For example, under the leadership of Candice McQueen, the Tennessee Department of Education partnered with a community-based advocacy group for Latino families called Conexión Américas, to ensure that when it comes to engaging the Latino community, they weren't just checking a box. Instead, Tennessee committed to doing the intentional and inclusive work needed to engage the Latino

community in meaningful, authentic conversations. What that meant on the ground is that, in addition to community meetings conducted by the Department, Conexión Américas led community meetings in all three of the state's regions, where they talked to Latino families — and listened to those families — about the new education law. A representative from the SEA was present at all of the meetings; but the meetings themselves, which were largely conducted in Spanish, were facilitated by staff from Conexión Américas.

Another approach is the one taken by the Hawaii Department of Education under Kathryn Matayoshi. During the first phase of ESSA community outreach last spring, Hawaii teamed up with teacher fellows to host a series of focus groups — 108 of them, on six islands — and administered an online survey which netted more than 1,200 additional responses. This past fall, the Board of Education also held community meetings in Oahu, Hawaii, Maui, Molokai and Kauai, where they administered a second survey that gathered another 1,100 responses. These are just a couple examples, but they are a good illustration of how important it is for states to continue *meaningful* engagement with communities, and others not typically included in these conversations, throughout implementation of ESSA.

Another place where we're seeing states lead is on accountability systems that drive improvement for all kids in all schools. For example, in Ohio, where Paolo DeMaria and the Department are working to ensure a direct link between its accountability system and the supports the state provides by using the data collected through its accountability system to more directly inform districts' needs assessment and plans for supporting struggling schools. Their work is a great example of how states are aligning their accountability and school improvements system to drive improved outcomes for students.

Of course, even before ESSA, states were making important investments in their schools and students. Nevada, for example, has done a lot to pursue its goal of becoming the fastest-improving state in the nation by focusing intently on school improvement. In 2015, Nevada passed sweeping education reforms which infused over \$300M in new funding — coupled with new accountability — into the state system. The state has emphasized seeing all Nevada schools improve, recognizing and growing what's working in schools, and addressing persistently low-performing schools that, for decades, have not been serving kids with the quality education they deserve. Under Steve Canavero, Nevada is showing that what's required under federal law is a floor, not a ceiling, for what states can do to improve schools.

Of course, it goes without saying that as an organization, CCSSO is far from silent when it comes to federal policy and how it will impact the kids in our states. I believe CCSSO is the most influential education organization in the country. When we work together and agree on an issue that is in the best interest of our students, we get it done. Our collective voice as state leaders in education — from all political parties and past experiences — is powerful.

You saw this when we stood up for higher standards, better assessments, and more robust accountability systems. You saw it when every priority we outlined for reauthorizing ESSA was addressed in the final legislation. And you saw it when we had state chiefs testify at all three ESSA hearings since June 2016 to make sure ESSA reflected state priorities.

Another area where SEAs have a unique opportunity, and responsibility, in education is on the issue of equity. My fellow chiefs and I are making equity a priority of our work. The deference ESSA gives states and school chiefs to reassert our authority and influence over education policy gives us a truly unique opportunity for states to make equity a priority and we are seizing that opportunity. And to make sure we make the most of this moment, CCSSO and the Aspen Institute, in early February, released a paper;

*Leading for Equity: Opportunities for State Education Chiefs*, which outlines 10 commitments each of us can make to increase equity in our states.

The commitments outline a holistic approach to achieving equity for all students in a state, from prioritizing equity in state strategic plans to investing in our youngest learners. This paper builds on former CCSSO Board President Tony Evers' commitment to equity, and reflects the input we shared with CCSSO back in November when we were last gathered. We heard loud and clear that this is something that matters to *all* chiefs - we had chiefs from red states and blue states, from rural and urban states and from both coasts, stand up and say they are all in — on all 10 commitments. I encourage each of you to read the report for yourselves — I'm confident that you'll find its recommendations for how to advance equity at the state level as timely and well considered as I did. And to get ahead of myself just a bit, I should note that the paper also incorporates one of my own priorities — improving the teaching profession — into one of its 10 commitments, which is: *Value people: focus on teachers and leaders. I intend to discuss this a bit further with you later.*

Another area where CCSSO is leading on an important issue in education is career readiness – meaning the imperative to provide young people today with access to high quality programs that provide them with the training they need to compete for high-skill, well-paying jobs. To help meet this urgent demand, CCSSO created the New Skills for Youth Initiative, in partnership with JPMorgan Chase, Advance CTE and Education Strategy Group, to support states in executing their visions for career-readiness programming. Last March, JPMorgan Chase and CCSSO awarded \$100,000 grants to 24 states and the District of Columbia for planning and early implementation of long-term career readiness education programs aligned with the needs of area employers. These states received targeted coaching and support to begin implementing these programs over the past year.

This past January, 10 of these states were selected to each receive a three-year, \$2 million dollar grant to design and develop career preparedness education programs that provide young people with the skills they need to compete for high-skill, well-paying jobs. Those states include Delaware, Kentucky, Louisiana, Massachusetts, Nevada, Ohio, Oklahoma, Rhode Island, Tennessee and Wisconsin. But it's not only states receiving New Skills for Youth grants that are improving their career-readiness programming. In [Wyoming](#), for instance, Jillian Balow and the state Department of Education have made a commitment to creating multiple pathways to career readiness through partnerships with high schools, community colleges and local businesses. It's not controversial to acknowledge that not every student will pursue a four-year degree, but in an era where technology is demanding an increasingly skilled and trained workforce at every level, these are the kinds of solutions we need to prepare today's young people for the world of tomorrow.

As you'll hear more about throughout this conference, chief state school officers are leading ambitious policy and programmatic changes to improve the entire education system. I am proud of the work of my peers, and as CCSSO President I am eager to support and highlight their work.

In particular though, the issue I've chosen to focus on as President is elevating and improving teaching. Let's get back to this idea. We need to value people. And because you can always expect honesty from me as CCSSO president, I'll say right up front that rather than trying to get the ball rolling from a standstill on this issue, my goal is to add whatever momentum, energy, and new thinking I can to some great work that's thankfully already underway. Let me tell you about a few things that I'm really excited about.

We've talked about CCSSO leading on equity. We also need to talk about our commitment to equity by diversifying the teacher pipeline. South Dakota has joined forces with educators and leaders in Missouri, Mississippi, Nebraska, Pennsylvania and Wisconsin to set a shared goal that, by 2040, we will achieve parity in our respective states in the demographic make-up of teachers and the K12 student population. By coming together and crossing state divides in these conversations, we demonstrate our commitment to equity by learning together, challenging one another and engaging in courageous conversations about race and equity.

There is also tremendous work underway to strengthen educator preparation to better support teachers in the challenging work they do every day in the classroom. For example, CCSSO leads the Network for Transforming Educator Preparation, a coalition of 13 forward-thinking states that took the lead in working to transform educator preparation. Over the past three years, we've really dug in and worked together, and here are some of the results:

- Candice McQueen and the [Tennessee](#) State Board of Education introduced a new Teacher Preparation Report Card to provide valuable feedback on education preparation program performance.
- Under Richard Woods, [Georgia](#) has extended clinical experiences for teacher candidates. For instance, a partnership between Georgia College and Baldwin-County Public Schools allows teacher candidates to begin classroom rotations beginning in their junior year, instead of waiting until the 2<sup>nd</sup> semester of their senior year. Teacher candidates then spend their entire senior year embedded with a classroom, so they can study the theory behind their observations and practicum experience in their own coursework.
- In [Missouri](#), Margie Vandeven and the Department of Elementary and Secondary Education instituted a listening tour of teacher mentors to help the state education department figure out how to improve training for preservice teachers.

That's the beauty of CCSSO – we all benefit from the work states are doing by networking with each other and sharing our successes. My state has also led on this issue, and I'm continuing to learn from others leading in this area. A number of the institutions in South Dakota are currently requiring year-long residencies for teacher candidates in clinical practice and coursework. Additionally, our state has taken strong steps to enhance the prestige of the teaching profession, after passing comprehensive legislation in 2016 to make new investments in teacher salaries, mentorship programs and personalized learning. Those investments make a statement to teachers that South Dakota values their commitment and leadership in the classroom as true professionals.

ESSA also provides states with some opportunities to rethink how we can provide the best support possible to educators, and Louisiana is a wonderful example of a state that has been doing some deep thinking about how to support educators with funding. One of Louisiana's key challenge areas is how to develop a strong educator profession and they've been really creative in examining what they can do to better support that goal. For example, John White and the Louisiana Department of Education intend to create a Teacher Mentor certificate, to grant mentors a stipend of \$1,000 per year and to adjust the accountability framework for such professionals through a Compass rubric and goal-setting framework specific to mentors. Altogether, the state will invest \$100,000 annually in mentor-specific training.

This goes to the heart of where I'd like to focus my effort during my time as CCSSO president: on supporting and valuing the teaching profession — and changing negative perceptions that do nothing but hold the talented people working in schools across the country back. I consider this to be a

fundamentally student-focused goal because the plain fact is that, if we want to attract and retain the best teachers, we must collectively elevate the status of teaching in the eyes of the public.

How can we do that? I'm glad you asked — because I have some ideas. We can do it by increasing the visibility, recognition and respect of educators in and outside the profession, and we can do it by helping policymakers better partner, collaborate and engage with educators. Last month, through CCSSO's National Teacher of the Year Program, I had an opportunity to discuss some of my ideas with the 2017 Teachers of the Year in each state. I asked exemplary teachers in each of your states for feedback on my plan, and I'll share some of what they said with you now. These standout teachers said that one of our first priorities, as chiefs, should be to shift the narrative about education from stories about failure to stories that illustrate the realities in classrooms, how schools are showing progress and growth, and how communities can support these improvements.

To do that, they told me, we need to see and to hear more stories about teachers — about their impact, about the complexity of their jobs, about the schools and communities they work in. These teachers are convinced that we have an opportunity to reframe how communities think about school by showing a new vision of teaching and learning. They understood that Chiefs have their own personal experiences and connection to the profession. They urged us to lead this narrative shift by sharing our own stories, incorporating stories of individual teachers and teachers, even when talking about education at the state level.

It was clear to me that these teachers were deeply committed to equity in education, and that they wanted to take responsibility with policymakers to be a part of the solution. It strikes me that these are the types of champions we want to have on our teams. I have set a precedent to tap into teachers as advisors and activists in my state, and I would challenge you to do the same.

Now as we all know well, no conversation about education is ever simple; there is always more to say and there are always worthwhile topics that don't get the attention they deserve. But I hope that I've been able to give you a sense today of my own perspective on the state of the field, and of how I plan to keep CCSSO front and center in conversations about education, whether those conversations are happening in the house on the corner, in the school house, the state house, the House of Representatives or in the White House.

And the good news is, just like the amazing young people you see here, we are just getting started on this. I look forward to many more conversations with all of you in the weeks and months ahead.