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**CONTACT:** Mark Johnston, (605) 773-5706, or Mary Stadick Smith, (605) 773-7228

### **Governor provides vision, goals for education in South Dakota**

PIERRE, S.D. - Governor Mike Rounds launched the 2010 Education Initiative today. The initiative provides a vision for the future of education in South Dakota, as well as a plan of measurable goals and objectives for achieving that vision.

"The future of our children is too important to be left to chance. South Dakota's children need the academic tools that will allow them to succeed in a world where the competition for economic opportunity is increasingly challenging," Rounds said. "This plan will serve as a road map that will guide South Dakota's public education system in the next decade. It offers a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to change the shape of how education is delivered in South Dakota."

The plan features specific and measurable goals, objectives and action steps that fall under three major areas: Starting Strong, Finishing Strong and Staying Strong. The goals are as follows:

Goal 1: By 2010, all third grade students will be proficient - or on a learning plan to become proficient - in reading and math.

Goal 2: By 2010, South Dakota will be first in the nation for the percentage of students going on to college, technical school or advanced training.

Goal 3: By 2010, the postsecondary education system will fully meet the needs of the state's changing economy and its citizens.

Goal 4: By 2010, South Dakota will build its educator base through targeted recruitment, retention and training.

Goal 5: By 2010, South Dakota will increase educational outcomes for American Indian students.

Goal 6: By 2010, South Dakota will target financial resources to improve classroom instruction and educational opportunities.

"Each of the 50-plus initiatives listed in this plan causes something to change within the education system. Some of these changes are minor. Some are not. Together, they represent a paradigm shift in our education system," Rounds said. "For those school districts that choose to participate, the benefits to students will pay off for generations to come."

The first major piece of the 2010E plan, called Starting Strong, provides for a continuum of services for South Dakota's youngest learners. It lays the foundation for future academic success through initiatives such as access to preschool screening, coordinating preschool opportunities for all 4-year-olds, targeted training for teachers, and development of an assessment tool to measure student progress in the primary grades.

"Any educator will tell you that the earlier students fall behind in school, the harder it is for them to catch up," said Dr. Rick Melmer, secretary of the South Dakota Department of Education. "Starting Strong gives our youngsters the best start possible."

One of the highlights of Starting Strong is the coordination of preschool services. "Under this plan, qualified 4-year-olds will have access to quality preschool," Melmer said. The plan calls for a blended approach to preschool, featuring partnerships between local school districts, Head Start and private preschool providers. Any preschool - public or private - that meets accreditation requirements would be eligible to participate in the program.

The second major piece of the 2010 Education Initiative, called Finishing Strong, provides opportunities that prepare *all* students for postsecondary education and success in today's highly competitive world.

"At the high school level, Finishing Strong provides students with a rigorous, relevant experience that sufficiently prepares them for future learning," Melmer said. It outlines the use of tools such as personal learning plans, senior projects, accelerated learning courses, and virtual school.

Finishing Strong also includes a laptop initiative, which provides incentive money for school districts to initiate one-to-laptop programs for high school students. "This program is not simply about putting computers into the hands of high school students. It is about changing the way teachers teach and students learn," said Melmer.

At the postsecondary level, Finishing Strong focuses on increasing the proportion of South Dakota citizens graduating from college and with graduate degrees. It also aims to provide access to lifelong education, to support a growing knowledge-based economy.

The final piece of the 2010 Education plan is Staying Strong. Goals in this area cover teacher recruitment and retention, educational outcomes for American Indian students, and funding.

"This part of the plan outlines steps that we can take to build and expand our base of talented teachers," Melmer said. It creates mentoring programs for teachers new to the field, provides support to teachers pursuing advanced degrees, and assists districts interested in addressing teacher compensation.

Under the plan, American Indian students will be able to participate in intensive summer school academies designed to prepare them for graduation and postsecondary education.

"We have great hopes for this program, which includes strong academic and support components for these young people," Melmer said.

"South Dakota should be proud of its education system," Rounds concluded. "Working together, we will make our education system even better. Most importantly, we will provide our young people with the opportunities for success that they so deserve. That's what this initiative is all about - providing opportunities for kids. And if we follow this road map, the kids will be the winners."

More information regarding the 2010 Education Initiative can be found at [www.2010education.com](http://www.2010education.com).