



## Literacy Matters Tour

### Monday, October 17, 2011 - DAY ONE:

Like a group of students on their first day of school, 40 eager community, education and business leaders arrived at Mile High United Way headquarters to join Lt. Gov. Garcia and President/CEO Christine Benero for an early morning lift-off of the *Literacy Matters Colorado* Bus Tour.



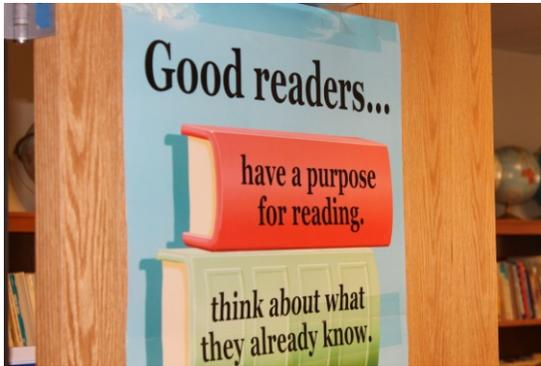
Undaunted by the ice and snow of an early morning October blizzard, the bus arrived just a few minutes late to a warm and welcoming crowd in Steamboat Springs. Speaking to educators, government officials, business leaders, community non-profit members and parents, Lt. Gov. Garcia and Christine Benero delivered a clear vision for all children to become successful readers by the end of third grade in Colorado. From the community came stories of strong collaborations with government agencies and business leaders, and a clear commitment to improving early learning from birth to grade school. One bus tour guest commented after the dialogue, “It is clear that the educators in Steamboat Springs are committed to helping struggling readers with ideas for better teacher preparation programs and access to additional first-rate instruction.” Another guest wrote, “This community is trying to share bi-lingual and culturally-appropriate materials with parents to help all children learn.”



*Lt. Gov. Garcia, or “Big, Bad, Joe” as he told the children he likes to be called, delighted and inspired the class with the story of Llama, Llama, Red Pajama. Next on the tour came a stop in Craig at the City Council Chambers. Even though the schools were enjoying a fall holiday, several teachers and the School Board President were on hand to share*

their ideas and hopes for early learning in Colorado. Many of the preschool and childcare advocates talked about the challenges of recruiting and retaining qualified teachers in small, rural communities. With partners like the Boys & Girls Club, who provide enrichment opportunities for students on early release days, and a community college committed to partnering with K-12 system, Craig appears to be poised for early learning success.

The first day wrapped up with a reception at Colorado Mesa University with host, CMU President Tim Foster and local community leaders. There was excitement in the air as the team began preparing for day two in Fruita, Rifle, Glenwood Springs and Aspen.



## Tuesday, October 18, 2011 - DAY TWO:

Good morning, Colorado! Day Two of the *Literacy Matters Tour* started with a small gathering of the best book people we know: those who serve the children (and books!) of our public libraries. Local library leaders from Mesa County met with Lt. Gov. Garcia and Christine Benero for an in-depth perspective on the role and responsibilities of libraries in an early literacy initiative.

In Fruita, the tour guests were welcomed by an enthusiastic group of adults and children who shared their unique successes and challenges with early literacy. One community member talked about the importance of early interventions through their first grade reading recovery program – and the challenges faced with sustaining such efforts with limited resources. Another shared hopes for eliminating the stigma of illiteracy for both children and adults.

Lt. Gov. Garcia sends a special shout out to Horatio at Rim Rock Elementary School – this young student persisted in finding a way to welcome Lt. Gov. Garcia to his special school. For a close look at our experience in Fruita, catch this clip provided by the amazing communications talent of the Mesa County Valley School District 51 Communications team! <http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=eYWO3YOz8PA>



Intrigued by a local newspaper article, Lt. Gov. Garcia took a side trip to the Grand Valley Center for Family Learning in Parachute. According to *The Daily Sentinel*, “This facility of Garfield County School District No. 16, takes a holistic approach to early childhood education by focusing on parents and parental education as well, and also addressing health care, teen parents and other considerations that have a bearing on how a child starts out in school.”

On to a visit in Rifle at the Garfield County Library with the Aspen Community Foundation’s “Gus the Bus” – an amazing preschool learning library and classroom on

wheels! A guest on the tour commented upon seeing a family with two young children in the library carefully selecting books, “This is exactly what we hope to promote – parents involved with their children’s learning.”

The final stop of the day landed the *Literacy Matters Tour* at Sopris Elementary School in Glenwood Springs. Great conversations with community leaders and teachers on the challenges they face with shifting demographics and early learning supports and resources. Several children offered a special smile and wave as they ended the day with their new “Llama, Llama” books in hand!

Wednesday, October 19, will find the *Literacy Matters Tour* under Colorado’s sunny skies in Aspen, Montrose, Ouray and Durango.



### Wednesday, October 18, 2011 - DAY THREE:

The wheels on the bus went round and round as the *Literacy Matters Tour* visited more of Colorado's western communities.



At an early morning coffee, Aspen School District staff discussed their successes in early learning by bridging the transition between preschools and the K-12 system, supporting at-risk students through the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP), and enlisting the help of parents and volunteers, some as young as middle school. Like many of the resort communities across Colorado, shifting demographics and increasing English Language Learners populations have inspired new and thoughtful approaches to classroom instruction and teacher professional development.



Next Stop – Montrose Regional Library. Lt. Gov. Garcia, Christine Benero and bus guests were pleased with the great turnout from regional and local educators, early childhood advocates, business leaders, and government officials. Christine Benero noted the strong representation from different sectors was indicative of Montrose's celebrated status as a 2011 winning community for the "100 best communities for young people." This rich conversation included talk about the importance of family involvement and programs like Bright Futures, which serves more than 75 families in three of the regional counties with very successful early reading supports.

When asked for his opinion of the *Literacy Matters Tour* this far, the Lieutenant Governor replied, “This has been an unbelievable two days. The community conversations have exceeded my expectations, because each conversation, from very different communities, has provided substantial and meaningful input for a comprehensive statewide literacy action plan.”



Another hour of travel brought the tour to the beautiful views and sunshine of Ouray and their one-building preK-12 school district with just under 200 students. In addition to an engaging conversation with local community educators and leaders, The Pearson Foundation delivered another terrific round of books into the hands of the youngest readers in the school. The children yelled their enthusiasm for Llama, Llama, Red Pajama as the adults in the room looked on.

The tour members closed out another very full day with a teacher roundtable at Needham Elementary School in Durango.



## Thursday and Friday, October 19 & 20, 2011 – DAYS FOUR & FIVE:

Greeted by a bright and beautiful Thursday morning, the bus guests departed Durango for a three hour drive to Alamosa. Take a look at the view!

The residents from towns all over the San Luis Valley warmly received the *Literacy Matters Tour* at Ortega Middle School. Several members of the audience voiced needs for additional school and community resources, made worse by the economic challenges facing southern Colorado. This community expressed appreciation for the many “foster grandparents” organized through SeniorCorps - a federally grant funded national service program reaching 14 counties in Southern Colorado. These grandmas and grandpas provide multigenerational learning experiences and support. A local principal praised the grandparents in the crowd for bridging the learning and social/emotional needs of the children with absent/working parents.



At a brief coffee stop in Walsenburg, Lt. Gov. Garcia met an elderly woman curious about the bus and our excursion around the state. She said she was interested in volunteering at the local schools, but didn't know how to get involved. Within minutes, the *Literacy Matters Tour* had recruited its first official volunteer of the week – thanks Helen, and welcome aboard!

At the next community conversation in La Junta, the crowd heard first from the Rocky Ford Superintendent. While proud of their full-day Preschool and Kindergarten programs, they still have a great need for more printed materials for family reading at home. Adding to this comment, a representative from Catholic Charities said a lack of reading materials hampered the effectiveness of their Parents as Teachers programs, “When a parent reads to their child, that book becomes more special than a new toy.”



On to Pueblo and dinner with members of the Southwest Colorado Higher Education Consortium, and a reception with local business and community leaders. Some of the discussion topics included early childhood teacher preparation programs and the compensation disparities with the K-12 sector, the need to inspire the dream of college and career at an early age, and the importance of early outreach to low income, minority families.



The final day of the excursion had arrived, and while the guests were a bit road-weary, the enthusiasm and commitment to helping every child in Colorado learn to read seemed greater than ever.

A visit to Martinez Elementary School in Colorado Springs highlighted another wide variety of effective programs and local efforts for early literacy. A library representative talked about how they've refined their Reading Initiative for parents by instructing parents to use five simple steps: talk, sing, read, write and play! The crowd heard about great partnerships with healthcare professionals, through programs like Reach Out and Read that connect 30,000 kids in Teller and El Paso counties with pre-literacy awareness and books. From Soldier Services, Headstart and Nurse Family Partnerships in Cripple Creek to the Pikes Peak United Way and PTA's around the city, strong community collaboration is critical to helping families understand the importance of literacy and the role they can play in supporting early child development.

Early Connections Learning Center in downtown Colorado Springs hosted the final community conversation of the tour. This beautiful Historic Day Nursery is home to the first Early Learning Ventures Alliance in the state. The Alliance partners providers in El Paso County to improve quality of service through consolidated business practices. This model helps small, independent providers gain economies of scale by reducing the burden of business administration. Audience members emphasized the important "return on investment" when business and nonprofit leaders support early childhood learning and services with resources and volunteers.



As we close the story of the *Literacy Matters Tour*, it is important to thank the many communities who opened their doors to our conversations. Lt. Gov. Garcia, Christine Benero and all of the bus guests, extend their appreciation to those across the state who took the time to share their thoughts, concerns, hopes and dreams for the future of Colorado.

And For the 16,000 children in this state who were not reading at grade level last year:

- 40 people representing diverse backgrounds, interests and organizations embarked on a journey for 1,378 miles;

- To 18 towns and cities across the state of Colorado on a bus with 6 wheels, 28 seats and one very patient bus driver;
- To share in 14 community conversations, in five receptions, two breakfasts, and one snowstorm with more than 730 educators, business leaders, elected officials, nonprofit representatives, community members and leaders, volunteers and most importantly, families and children.
- With one clear vision – that someday soon, all children in Colorado will be successful readers with the unlimited potential for happy, healthy and productive lives.

David Merage, Founder of The David and Laura Merage Foundation, said: “The most important thing we can do for our children is to continue this conversation outside of this building and outside of our early childhood circles. This is the most important social issue of our time.”

We agree.

Please join in the dialogue and share this website with colleagues, friends and family:  
[www.literacymatterscolorado.org](http://www.literacymatterscolorado.org).



*About the Literacy Matters Colorado Bus Tour:*

*It is our vision for Colorado to one day lead the nation in early reading achievement with the implementation of an integrated literacy initiative that will ensure all Colorado children are reading at grade level or beyond by the end of third grade. Early childhood literacy is not only the key to the success of Colorado’s schools, but to the state of Colorado.*

*The purpose of this early childhood literacy effort is three-fold:*

- *To ignite a statewide community conversation around the importance of early childhood literacy.*

- *To hear from communities, learn what is working, highlight successes, and understand what challenges they face in teaching young children to read.*
- *To build relationships by partnering and supporting communities in embracing a common goal of ensuring that every child read at grade level by the third grade.*