

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE **Contact:** Steven Shapiro
303.886.6342

HOPE ONLINE LEARNING ACADEMY RESPONDS TO CRITICS

Five Point Plan Aggressively Addresses Concerns For the Benefit of the At-Risk Children Served

Denver, CO—October 18, 2006—Hope Online Learning Academy Co-Op, the online charter school that serves Colorado’s at-risk children in grades K-12, announced today a five point plan to address the criticisms raised in recent articles in the Denver Post and Rocky Mountain News. Many of these initiatives have been underway as part of the ongoing development of process and infrastructure to accommodate the growth of Hope Co-Op.

“By virtue of Hope Co-Op’s growth, it is clearly serving a critical need for at-risk children in our community. Hope Co-Op’s early results demonstrate tremendous progress with our students,” said Heather O’Mara, Executive Director of Hope Co-Op. “We take our responsibility as a public institution seriously, and we will make any and all adjustments necessary to the policies and procedures of our innovative model to ensure Hope Co-Op students’ continued success.”

As it enters its second year of operation, Hope Co-Op serves at-risk children across the state. Hope Co-Op’s student population is 74% minority, and more than 75% of students qualify for free and reduced lunch. These are students who have not been successful in the traditional education system. To better serve our children, Hope Co-Op announced the following actions:

- 1) **Conduct Learning Center Investigations**— Hope Co-Op has already begun its own investigation into the concerns raised by the articles. At least one Learning Center will be put on immediate probation; Hope Co-Op will not request State funding for the enrolled students attending this Learning Center. Hope Co-Op will not tolerate any infractions of its policies, particularly related to non-sectarian education.
- 2) **Clarify and Enforce Process and Procedures**— Hope Co-Op will continue to work with the State, the Vilas RE-5 School District and all Learning Centers to clarify appropriate implementation of Hope Co-Op’s complete education program. This will include identifying and addressing questions of dual

- enrollment and implementing Hope Co-Op in Learning Centers operated by private, faith-based schools.
- 3) **Launch Certification Program**— While the Hope Co-Op training and handbooks define rules, regulations and requirements of operating a Learning Center, confusion still exists. As a result, Hope Co-Op is launching a Learning Center Certification program to ensure that Learning Centers have complete comprehension of, and are fully compliant with, all Hope Co-Op policies and procedures. Emphasis will be placed on Hope Co-Op’s non-sectarian policy.
 - 4) **Increase Accountability Staffing**— Hope Co-Op has been in the process of hiring a Chief Compliance Officer who will work with internal and external auditors to ensure accountability. Additionally, Hope Co-Op had already engaged a team of advisors to provide direction on separation of church and state, administrative control and charter school procedures.
 - 5) **Expand Supervision of Learning Centers**— In cooperation with the Chief Compliance Officer, Hope Co-Op is establishing a quality control team that will augment the oversight of the Learning Centers that currently exists with teachers, Learning Center directors and Hope Co-Op administrators.

“The Vilas school district chartered Hope Co-Op in order to provide another option for at-risk students,” said Joe Shields, Superintendent of the Vilas RE-5. “We are confident in the action plan Hope Co-Op has outlined, and we will also continue to implement and utilize our accountability plans and oversight measures.”

Hope Co-Op is a new and effective model of education that is bridging the digital divide by affording at-risk students the benefits of online education in a nurturing environment. That nurturing environment is provided by the Learning Centers that have been established by organizations with a commitment to education. The Learning Centers are highly monitored by the Learning Center directors, as well as qualified teachers. The teachers are licensed professionals who oversee the progress of the students at the centers in their area. In the Learning Center, children experience a low 1:18 adult to student ratio by virtue of a trained mentor, who must have achieved at least a two year degree and one year of teaching and/or counseling experience. In fact, 90% of Hope Co-Op’s mentors have at least a four year college degree.

“Hope Co-Op welcomes accountability”, continues O’Mara. “Hope Co-Op achieved 98% CSAP participation of those Hope Co-Op students eligible. Hope Co-Op’s scores do not reflect how far our students have come in just one year. The chart below compares CSAP performance to the results of Hope Co-Op-administered testing:

	Reading	Math
Hope Co-Op Students who tested below grade level upon enrollment*	88%	93%
Hope Co-Op Students who scored Partially Proficient or Unsatisfactory on CSAP	71%	82%
IMPROVEMENT	+17%	+11%
Hope Co-Op Students who scored Proficient or Advanced on CSAP	29%	18%

* As this was the first year of operation for Hope Co-Op, prior year's CSAP data for Hope Co-Op students is not currently available for a CSAP to CSAP comparison. However, Hope Co-Op is working with the Colorado Department of Education to compile the data for each student in order to evaluate the year-over-year progress.

“There is tremendous potential in online education for kids in Colorado. The Children’s Campaign is hopeful that accountability can be addressed so that as many children as possible can have access to high quality learning experiences,” said Alex Medler, Vice President, Research and Analysis. “We are encouraged by Hope Co-Op’s willingness to address issues with their program so they can continue to serve the children who need them.”

#