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**HOPE ONLINE LEARNING ACADEMY CO-OP LAUNCHES
FREE PUBLIC CHARTER SCHOOL TO MEET NEEDS OF AT-RISK STUDENTS**

*New Colorado Virtual Charter School Launches Innovative Learning Model
That Bridges the Digital and Educational Divide*

Denver, CO – Hope Online Learning Academy Co-Op (Hope Co-Op), a virtual charter school designed to meet the needs of at-risk students in Colorado, has introduced an innovative learning model that will provide online curriculum, access to mentoring and technology to students across the state. Parents of Hope Co-Op children may either provide the virtual school environment themselves, with assistance from Hope Co-Op mentors, or may enroll at a Hope Co-Op-approved learning center to provide teaching assistance and a supportive location for learning to take place. Hope Co-Op provides the only opportunity for Colorado’s at-risk kids with working parents to participate in online education. Hope Co-Op is chartered through the Vilas RE-5 School District and serves students from grades kindergarten through twelve.

“In recent years, virtual schools have played a significant role in reaching students that need the flexibility of time, pace, and geography to advance their education,” said Heather O’Mara, President of Hope Co-Op. “However, there continues to be a divide for a segment of students—mostly those at-risk for one reason or another—who don’t have the appropriate home resources and supportive environment to succeed independently online. Hope Co-Op is designed to acknowledge these learning differences and address them with the benefits of the online curriculum of a virtual school with one-on-one attention.”

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Bridging the Digital Divide



Parents decide whether to have their child enter the virtual classroom at an approved Learning Center or at home. Hope-approved online learning centers may be located in existing public or private schools, community centers, or other appropriate facilities where parents choose to have their students participate in Hope Co-Op's program. Learning centers enable students to work on different Hope Co-Op lessons at different grade levels at the same time in a supportive environment with a mentor. This environment allows individuals to progress at their own pace and provides the opportunity for students to receive remediation or enrichment as needed. The web-based curriculum provides a well-rounded education, and focuses on traditional subjects, including reading, writing, math, science, social sciences and foreign languages. Enhanced with computer-based exercises and coursework, lessons are geared towards each child's learning style and ability.

"Hope Co-Op is a marvelous extension of what VILAS has been working towards for years," said Bill Hines, founder of Vilas Online. "It is providing children a supportive, nurturing environment that combines a virtual school with the option of a supervised and mentoring environment." Joe Shields, Superintendent of Vilas added, "There are a large number of students who don't have the financial resources; the access to hardware, software and internet connectivity; and the supervision and support at home. Now, these students have a place they can go to overcome all of those barriers by attending Hope Co-Op."

One of the hallmarks of Hope Co-Op is the emphasis on quality public education. Hope Co-Op students are assessed through mandatory state testing, including the CSAP, in addition to tracking daily student progress using online assessments. In a particularly significant move, Hope Co-Op graduation standards require students to perform well enough on standardized testing that, if they choose to enter college, they will not require any remedial courses. Over one half of the nation's high school students graduate and head off to a post-secondary institution only to find that they are required to take remedial level courses to bring them up to speed for college-level classes.

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Hope Co-Op is assuring remedial course exemption by requiring its graduates to receive minimum scores of 17 in English, 18 in reading and 19 in math on the ACT; and 85 on the Accuplacer, subject to reasonable accommodations for special education students. Students who are unable to meet the requirements are offered free remedial assistance.

“Accountability is our highest priority,” continued O’Mara. “We will measure each Hope Co-Op student’s progress every step of the way to ensure that they are getting the education they need, and the education they deserve.”

Students interested in enrolling in Hope Co-Op for the 2006 – 2007 academic year must be enrolled in a Colorado public school for at least one semester or be 7 years of age or younger as of October 1, 2006. Though open to all students meeting these requirements, Hope is specifically focusing efforts on students who are (1) “academically at risk,” performing below grade level in at least one academic content area assessed by the CSAP, or an equivalent standardized test (2) living in a home or community that is “at risk,” including qualifying for free or reduced lunch or (3) attending a neighborhood public school that has been rated, in one of the previous three years, as “low” or “unsatisfactory.” Students who are eight years of age or older as of October 1, 2006 and who are enrolled in first grade or above in a private school or home school are not eligible to enroll in Hope Co-Op.

For its inaugural year, Hope Co-Op will have students statewide, with the majority of students in Denver, Boulder and Colorado Springs. Hope Co-Op has 40 approved Learning Centers in these metro areas, and is serving more than 1,500 students. Parents of Hope Co-Op students can elect to have their children participate from home, or at one of the Hope Co-Op -approved learning centers.

Hope Co-Op is supported by public funding, and boasts a prestigious advisory board including Polly Baca, Barbara O’Brien, Glenn Jones, Keith King, Greg Lopez, Terri Rayburn-Davis and Gully Stanford.

For more information about Hope Co-Op, call 303-324-2100 or visit www.hopeco-op.org