

June 15, 2020

Dear Dr. Anthes:

As the collective voice of 10 diverse education organizations committed to the highest quality outcomes for all students, we believe responding to academic learning loss should be the primary focus for the upcoming school year. We understand based on local district feedback that many students have been deeply affected by the health, economic and social turmoil over the last four months. While districts across the state stepped up to meet the challenges of educating their students through diverse remote learning models, specialized online curricula, created drive-through breakfast/ lunch programs, and provided distance social-emotional supports, the outcomes of these choices are unknown. Stakeholders should understand how these local innovations impacted educational outcomes for all students. Indeed, as some have noted, school districts went above and beyond to ensure students received educational services with little advance notice and the allocation of scarce resources for the 2020-2021 school year necessitates **statewide diagnostic tools<sup>1</sup> to understand where students are so we can best meet their needs.**

Before discussing the future, we first acknowledge the superhero-like capabilities of our educators. With little to no warning, our educators became experts in online platforms, recorded lesson plans, graded virtual assignments, and checked in on students who were anxious or scared. Additionally, districts implemented different policies for attendance, assignments, grading, social promotion, online curriculum, and these decisions will yield different results. As students return to school in the Fall, thoughtful and meaningful collaborations to retool and reorganize existing models will require clear, actionable data to assess the impact of prolonged school closures on student achievement; student-focused programming cannot occur without this reflection.

**The most effective way to gather that data is to begin the 2020-2021 school year with a valid, reliable, statewide diagnostic tool for every K-12 student in Colorado funded by a portion of the 10% set-aside the Colorado Department of Education retained from the CARES Act.** Responding to the significant student learning loss due to COVID-19 could be the education challenge of our time. Research shows prolonged absence from school impacts student achievement, especially for historically disadvantaged minorities, students with disabilities<sup>2</sup>, emerging multilingual students, and other student groups who are underserved by the education system.<sup>3</sup> These students need a coherent, systemic, and targeted response to mitigate the impact of lost instructional time; when school opens this fall, access to high quality instruction is paramount.

Districts are also starting to grapple with how to open schools in the fall while following public health orders that limit the amount of people that can be in a room. Superintendents and staff are considering various options for full programming, including having students attend school once or twice a week while participating in remote learning the other days of the week. If limits need to be placed on how many students can attend school at one time, districts should prioritize in-person learning for students who have not been adequately served by remote learning. A diagnostic assessment, many of which yield

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<sup>1</sup>Charles Barone and Nicholas Munyan-Penney highlighting 20 different diagnostic assessments that yield data immediately. <http://edreformnow.org/wp-content/uploads/2020/05/COVID-19-Response-Diagnostic-Assessment.pdf>

<sup>2</sup> Gershenson, S., & Hayes, M. (2017). The Summer learning of exceptional students. *American Journal of Education*, 123(3), 447-473; Menard, J., & Wilson, A. M. (2014). Summer learning loss among elementary school children with reading disabilities. *Exceptionality Education International*, 23(1), 72-85.

<sup>3</sup> Borman, G. D., & Dowling, N. M. (2006). Longitudinal achievement effects of multiyear summer school: Evidence from the Teach Baltimore randomized field trial. *Educational Evaluation and Policy Analysis*, 28(1), 25-48; Slates, S. L., Alexander, K. L., Entwisle, D. R., & Olson, L. S. (2012). Counteracting summer slide: Social capital resources within socioeconomically disadvantaged families. *Journal of Education for Students Placed at Risk*, 17(3), 165-185.

results immediately, allows for school leaders and educators to create schedules that differentiate support based on student need.

While some suggest that no reasonable observer could expect schools and districts to make up for the lost instruction time in just a single school year, such arguments undermine an overarching goal of education -- providing high-quality, impactful academic instruction. Families and communities deserve to know how the great experiment in remote learning impacted learning across the state. A uniform diagnostic assessment across Colorado, benchmarked to grade level expectations, empowers parents and community members with knowledge to make informed decisions. Participatory democracy mandates that parents and community know how their children are doing, whether they are on track to meet grade level benchmarks, and if not, how the education system plans on catching them up.

There are no easy solutions on how to respond to the significant learning loss that will have taken place because of the prolonged school closure. Nonetheless, clear and actionable data is needed in order for educators and policymakers to respond effectively. A statewide diagnostic tool will provide a clear-eyed view of opportunity and achievement gaps in light of COVID-19. The intent of the tool is solely to serve as a guide to educators and policy makers on how best to address the loss of learning and prepare for possible future disruptions; stakeholders should not use it for accountability purposes. Perhaps most importantly, diagnostic assessments will provide educators and school leaders with the information needed to create solutions that will have the potential to mitigate one of the biggest crises in education our society has ever faced.

Signed,

A+ Colorado  
African Leadership Group  
Colorado Latino Leadership, Advocacy, & Research Organization (CLLARO)  
Colorado Succeeds  
Democrats for Education Reform  
Education Reform Now Colorado  
Independence Institute  
Ready Colorado  
Stand for Children Colorado  
Transform Education Now

cc: The Honorable Governor Jared Polis  
Allie Kimmel, Senior Policy Advisor to Gov. Jared Polis  
Board Member Valentina Flores  
Board Member Rebecca McClellan  
Board Member Joyce Rankin  
Board Member Jane Goff  
Board Member Angelika Schroeder  
Board Member Debora Scheffel  
Board Member Steve Durham