

United States House Committee on Education and the Workforce
“American Education in Crisis”
February 8, 2023

WRITTEN TESTIMONY

The Honorable Jared Polis

Governor of Colorado

Introduction

Good morning, Chairwoman Foxx, Ranking Member Scott, and members of the Education & Workforce Committee. Thank you for the opportunity to testify on the State of Education.

I’ve spent much of my career in education, from launching and running charter schools and serving on the Colorado State Board of Education, to serving in Congress, including on this Committee, where I helped to reauthorize the broken No Child Left Behind Act and Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act, among others.

Today our country faces an education crisis. A crisis in quality, equity, in access, and affordability. And as leaders, we must do what we can to strengthen our public schools, create inclusive settings where all students can learn, and empower our educators and school leaders to give students the best education possible to prepare every learner for success, and power our economy.

Early Childhood

That starts with a strong early childhood system. Colorado has made incredible progress with free, full-day kindergarten and our new free [universal preschool program](#), which launches this fall, and will save families at least \$6,000 per year.

K12

We must also work to make historic investments in our public schools. While the pandemic brought forward significant challenges, we saw teachers, students, parents, school districts, higher education, and business step up in new and innovative ways.

We also saw unprecedented federal investments from COVID relief funds provided through the Governor’s Emergency Education Relief (GEER) Fund and the Elementary and Secondary Education Relief (ESSER) Fund. These funds allowed Democratic and Republican Governors alike to get students back into classrooms as quickly and safely as possible.

In Colorado, we used the lion's share of our [ESSER funds](#) to address learning loss, like starting the [Colorado High-Impact Tutoring program](#), which offered 43,000 hours of tutoring to 3,800 students in its first semester and is expanding this school year with the use of additional ESSER funds.

We've used GEER money to create the [RISE education fund](#) to invest in creative solutions to improve student learning, close equity gaps, and increase efficiency across the state, like the creation of a Mobile Learning Center housed in a repurposed school bus that brings resources, internet, and learning opportunities directly to students in mountainous Lake County, CO.

We also created the [Governor's Bright Spot Award](#) to recognize 21 schools that jumped two or more performance bands on our state accountability system since the pandemic began, like Rocky Mountain Elementary School in the St. Vrain Valley that implemented high-quality hybrid learning, and provided no-cost summer classes that offered evidence-based literacy and math instruction.

Last week I visited Chatfield Elementary School in Grand Junction, which improved three performance bands by focusing on professional development, aligning classroom work to academic standards, and providing additional support for struggling students.

We saw similar innovations across states, like Indiana's [Explore, Engage, and Experience Grant](#) that allows students to test out potential career pathways, and Washington's [Reimagine Education Project](#), which integrates social emotional learning into alternative learning structures.

Now, states are focused on improving student achievement, particularly around math, while creating safe and productive learning environments for every student, including major expansions to critical mental health support, like [IMatter](#), an American Rescue Plan Act-funded program that offers six free counseling sessions to all students in Colorado.

We also continue to graduate more high school students with postsecondary credit, work skills, and credentials.

53% of Colorado students took a dual and concurrent enrollment course, and continued investments will help this number grow. Colorado is also home to [CareerWise](#), which now supports thousands of youth apprentices in not just Colorado, but Indiana, New York, DC, and Michigan.

By blurring the lines between high school and higher education, we can save students money, help them gain skills, and set them up to better navigate postsecondary education.

Higher Education

And as we do that, we must find ways to make higher education more accessible and affordable. The number of students pursuing postsecondary education is declining, and it's

largely due to high costs. [Bureau of Labor and Statistics data](#) show that “between 2006 and 2016, the Consumer Price Index for tuition and fees increased 63%, compared to 21% for other goods and services.”

That’s why we have proposed a new scholarship to support any graduate in the class of 2024 who is pursuing postsecondary education, and launched the [Zero Textbook Challenge](#), which encourages Colorado institutions to expand the use of open educational resources.

I also want to applaud the Biden Administration’s efforts to pause student loan payments during the pandemic, provide widespread debt relief, and continue to increase Pell Grant funding.

But it’s not only about affordability, it’s about ensuring students get a real return on investment, holding schools accountable, and protecting students from predatory practices.

We need full transparency so that students can make informed decisions about where to spend their hard-earned time and money.

Workforce

All of this work is to ensure that every student can get skills and knowledge to find a job that supports them and their family and meets the needs of our businesses.

In Colorado, [we have two open jobs for every unemployed person](#), which is why we are working to expand training opportunities in new and innovative ways.

We are providing [free community and technical college](#) for students pursuing careers in health care, with the hope of expanding to construction, firefighting, law enforcement, nursing, and early childhood education. 1,000 students were trained and entered the workforce within the first 3 months of this program.

Similarly, Texas has set a goal for 60% of Texans ages 25-64 to earn industry-recognized credentials through their [Credentials of Purpose and Value program](#).

We are also in the process of expanding registered apprenticeship opportunities, and have created a [first-of-its-kind opportunity](#) in the public health sector that fully integrates AmeriCorps and a Registered Apprenticeship.

I call on Congress to reauthorize WIOA so that states like Colorado can continue directing key WIOA investments towards its unique in-demand workforce needs, including key wraparound services.

Conclusion

Through all of this work, states are leading the charge on innovative ways to support students and workers of all ages.

The COVID pandemic exposed many of the cracks within our systems, showing us that we can't rely on the old way of doing things. We have to be bold and continue pursuing new and innovative ways to prepare all Americans for success.

Let's turn this crisis into action.

Many states have seen this as an opportunity to move forward, and I'm hopeful Congress can use this momentum to increase equity, quality, access, and affordability across education.

Thank you.