



## Learn Everywhere

### Ensuring Agility in Response to COVID-19

Students and families are facing unparalleled challenges because of COVID-19, and they are seeking responsiveness and innovation from education providers. More than ever, an agile education system that provides opportunity and access to all learners will be required to meet these needs. Over the previous months, multiple stakeholders—students, families, educators, administrators, researchers, and policymakers—graciously gave time and perspective to Colorado Succeeds to identify opportunities and challenges emerging from the pandemic that could inform future policy. All the policy advances suggested here may not be feasible in the 2021 legislative session, but they do provide opportunities to learn and evolve our education system in the short- and long-term to respond to the crisis and look toward the future.

This paper is one in a five-part series outlining policy ideas addressing education opportunities and challenges that have resulted from COVID-19. [The remaining papers include: Reimagining High School, Emphasizing Equity, Aligning Business and Student Incentives, and Higher Education Innovation.](#)

Education often focuses on gaps in opportunities that can be observed within the traditional school day, like course placement, access to electives, and advanced classes. Prior to COVID-19, however, gaps in access to enrichment experiences outside of the traditional school day were also being identified.

2020 has magnified the urgency of policy addressing gaps in opportunity. As the state and country responds to COVID-19, it has become clear that the funds affluent families invest in rounding out their child's education are significant, and that the school system is not designed with enough flexibility to make up the gaps for families with fewer resources.

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In communities across the state, there are families who can hire tutors to work with their child, who can pool their resources to hire a teacher to support their child in a small group with their friends, and who can continue to pay for piano lessons or specialized math intervention. In the same communities, there are families working hourly wage jobs who must go in to work to be paid, who cannot afford childcare or tutors to manage distance learning, and cannot pay for other supports for enrichment experiences to keep their child safe, healthy, and learning during this time.

Schools are experiencing heightened challenges in providing the personalized instructional support that all children and families need. In April, results from a Colorado Department of Education and the Colorado Education Initiative needs assessment revealed that 47 percent of all Colorado school districts need more support for remote

learning and 42 percent need additional instructional supports for teachers. Most schools simply have not been organized to prioritize agility, responsiveness, and the level of differentiated instruction that COVID-19 requires.

Schools can more effectively address the unique needs of their diverse learners by providing parents multiple ways to be seen and heard as partners in the learning process. Further, families without personal resources would benefit from greater access to public resources to ensure that their children get the opportunities they need to pursue interests, studies, and competencies that will lead them to academic and professional success.

### **Key Questions**

- ▶ What are the needs of families?
- ▶ What level of investment would make a difference for families?
- ▶ What source of funding will work in the short- and long-term?
- ▶ How does policy ensure that funds are student-centered and driven by families?

### **Policy Ideas and Adaptations**

Programs emerging in other states in response to COVID-19 can offer some direction. For example, Idaho created the [“Strong Families, Strong Students”](#) initiative, which includes \$50 million of direct funding to families. Eligible families may receive \$1,500 per student (up to \$3,500 per family) to use on a variety of educational purposes, including computer hardware, internet connectivity, tutoring, services for students with disabilities, fees for courses, and more. The program is open to all families, regardless of income, but will be offered to lower-income families first. Oklahoma created a similar program, setting aside approximately \$8 million for families with an income at or below the federal poverty guideline and a K-12 student in public, private, or home school education.

Colorado could pursue similar grant funds or ongoing support through legislation to address the glaring opportunity gap in both the short- and long-term.

## **Conclusion**

COVID-19 changed the way Coloradans do just about everything. Colorado Succeeds’ Practice to Policy Feedback Loop Sessions brought together critical stakeholders—teachers and school and district leaders, policy experts, and students and families—to learn more about the needs of learners. The policy ideas discussed above are a response to needs and frustrations highlighted from these stakeholders. As the country and the world adapts and recovers from the impacts of COVID-19, education systems and policies must adapt to become more responsive to the needs of students and families. Education must do more to ensure that all students have access to meaningful and impactful programs and opportunities—no matter where they are learning.

## **About Colorado Succeeds**

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Colorado Succeeds believes that great schools are good business. We are a movement of business leaders who are invested in improving schools, changing educational outcomes for kids, and shaping the future of Colorado’s workforce. Together, we support the educators who are innovating in the classroom and the policymakers who are changing the system. Learn more at [coloradosucceeds.org](https://coloradosucceeds.org).

### **Questions?**

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