



**GENERAL ASSEMBLY
STATE OF COLORADO**

Tuesday, July 28, 2020

Governor Jared Polis
200 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203

Dear Governor Polis:

We write today respectfully requesting you call a special session of the Colorado General Assembly for the purpose of addressing the serious challenges facing our State's K-12 students and parents in the face of the coronavirus pandemic. The special session should be limited to developing innovative policies that ensure every child has access to a high quality education, regardless of their unique health circumstances, age, or income level.

As the school year rapidly approaches, tens of thousands of parents throughout Colorado have entreated us to take action both to ensure the health and safety of their children and to prevent them from falling behind in their education as we deal with this unprecedented crisis. Parents need concrete, actionable, and flexible options for the 2020-2021 school year. Kids get one chance to receive a quality education, so we urge you to take immediate action to prevent lifetime damage to Colorado's children.

The Colorado Department of Education has published guidelines for school districts to use in their decision making, and our school districts have expressed a variety of intentions from beginning classes with social distancing to conducting classes through online and virtual classrooms, if at all. Over 30,000 Coloradans have signed a petition pleading for a safe return to in-person learning in school this fall. At the same time, our largest school employee union and its local constituent associations have asserted that they will not return to teach unless further precautions are taken. Many parents are both uncertain and fearful—fearful both as to their children's health and to the quality and continuity of their education.

In the face of these mixed messages and uncertainty, parents have implored us to take action to give them the freedom to choose what is best for their children and to do so in a way that they can manage and afford. Some groups of families have proposed plans to hire a teacher to collectively supervise their children's online learning enabling them to return to work. Others have indicated that they would home school if only they had the economic circumstances allowing them to do so. At the same time, many from the most challenging economic circumstances, single parents and those without the means to teach themselves, will see their children fall even further behind due to the lack of choice. This is unacceptable to them and to us as their elected representatives. We trust you share our belief.

Of course, the first question will be, what would the legislature do? While there may be many proposals, there is one that is particularly appropriate for Colorado and our tradition of parental control and school choice. Many children will not return to school because they or their families have unique health risks. Other students will not return to school because their school is not reopening for in-person learning in the fall, and a strictly online environment does not meet their academic needs.

Already, parents who cannot return to in-person schooling are proposing solutions that they believe best meet the needs of their children, as well as expressing what will best help them protect the health of their children and ensure that they do not fall behind. These solutions include individual family home schooling, microschoools, home school/online hybrids, and even neighborhood cooperatives hiring an educator to teach the children using traditional or online curriculum. The most affluent families will be able to ensure that these alternative programs are successful, but most Coloradans do not have the resources to access them. Thus, the primary challenge for families is an economic one.

Parents need the financial resources either to remain at home to teach or to engage someone to serve as their children's educator. **In response to this, one proposal we will introduce is a direct education support package for families, called "Safe Learning Choices".** This support would be available to families whose children cannot attend public school full-time due to the virus—whether due to their own risk concerns or due to their local school deciding not to operate. These families would be entitled to all or a portion of their child's per pupil revenue to access the educational resources they need to thrive during the pandemic. The funding would allow parents to remain at home, engage an educator, purchase quality curriculum and materials, and if necessary, the computers and broadband service to ensure access.

To be clear, our greatest concern is for those families who are most economically challenged. Many Colorado families—particularly single parent households—are facing an impossible choice: either work to put food on the table or stay at home to educate their child. If the state does not adapt education funding to recognize this obvious and undeniable reality, thousands of kids will be denied the quality education they deserve and need.

As we all have learned, many of our assumptions and models of operation have had to change rapidly to meet the changed circumstances of the current crisis. Many changes will remain after the passage of this crisis, and other old models and methods will be forever altered. These changes must happen for our State to adapt and prosper. One of the most important is the education of Colorado's children.

We have the opportunity to help these families whom we are elected to serve. However, without the call of a special session, we are unable to make the resources available to educate our State's children in new and dynamic ways to ensure equity in their education. Therefore, we ask that you call a special session as soon as practicable to allow us to meet this challenge. We also ask that our legislative colleagues from the majority party join with us in this request as we all share the concern, as well as the resolve to serve our constituents in this most challenging time.

We know that you and our legislative colleagues share our hopes for the children of Colorado. Now, let us join together to secure our children's future as we preserve the health and safety of Coloradans.

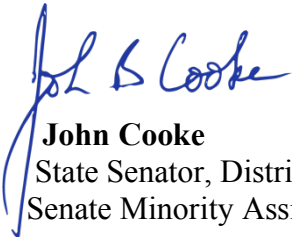
Sincerely,



Bob Gardner
State Senator, District 12



Chris Holbert
State Senator, District 30
Senate Minority Leader



John Cooke
State Senator, District 13
Senate Minority Assistant Leader



Vicki Marble
State Senator, District 23
Senate Minority Caucus Chair



Paul Lundeen
State Senator, District 9
Senate Minority Whip



Bob Rankin
State Senator, District 8
Senate Member, Joint Budget Committee



Larry Crowder
State Senator, District 35



Don Coram
State Senator, District 6



Owen Hill
State Senator, District 10



Dennis Hisey
State Senator, District 2



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Ray Scott
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State Representative, District 58

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Hugh McKean
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Perry Will
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Matt Soper
State Representative, District 54

Jim Wilson
State Representative, District 60