

June 22, 2020

DPS Board of Education Directors,

As a group of diverse education advocates, working collectively to improve educational outcomes for students in Denver Public Schools, we would be remiss not to share our priorities as you face this incredible budget challenge. Revenue forecasts from the DPS administration make it clear that painful cuts to district operations are unavoidable this year, and in the coming years, due to dramatic revenue losses as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

The COVID-19 crisis has laid bare the inequities that affect Denver's students, and is continuing to exacerbate the systemic marginalization of students that impedes their academic success. We commend you and Superintendent Cordova for immediately responding to ensure all students have access to food, internet, devices to access online learning, and so much more. In partnership, we thank you for prioritizing your most vulnerable students over the past 13 weeks. As policy makers, we ask that you continue to prioritize the students who have been most impacted by the crisis and those that historically and to this day are underserved by society. You have the opportunity to address this marginalization and work to reduce inequities when making decisions surrounding the budget. We encourage you NOT to prioritize policies and spending cuts that protect the current racial and economic power structures that perpetuate the paradigm of white supremacy in our society and education system.

While specific policy recommendations are beyond the scope of this letter, we urge you to incorporate the following principles into budgeting decisions you will have to make for the 2020-21 school year and those that follow:

1. Ensure the equitable distribution of resources, both personnel and financial, to systematically marginalized students. According to CDE data for 2019, 81% of white students graduated in 4 years in comparison to 68.3% of Black students. We urge you to build your budget with an equitable distribution of funds to ensure equitable outcomes.
2. Prioritize increased student social, emotional, and academic needs as we understand the trauma of the last four months, particularly those from historically and systemically marginalized communities and those who are from protected classes.
3. Meet your moral, ethical, and legal responsibilities as a board member by ensuring the focus is on meeting student's needs and implementing policies that will ensure success for all students before comforting adults.

Following these priorities will not take the pain away from the deep cuts that the board will be responsible for enacting. However, by truly keeping the needs of students first and choosing to acknowledge reality rather than misinformation, you have the opportunity to ensure that systematically marginalized communities are not forced to continue to bear the brunt of this pain.

The fact of the matter is that students at schools with privileged parent organizations that can raise thousands of dollars will be able to avoid the pain of drastic cuts. Any decisions that the board makes will fall disproportionately on the students and families who can least afford to be affected by them and have been most effected by the health and economic crisis. If the board is not mindful, these one-time cuts will lead to permanent learning loss, and economic damage that will resonate for decades, further exacerbating current inequities. Denver overwhelmingly is on

the West Steps and peacefully marching through our streets asking for true equality, now is the time to budget in alignment with that call to action.

Thank you for all that you have done to prioritize all DPS students during this crisis so far. We hope that you will keep these realities in mind while you make the decisions that will impact students. The decisions you make will be the evidence of your commitment to the core value of equity frequently mentioned in community meetings and media statements.

In partnership,

A+ Colorado

African Leadership Group (ALG)

Colorado Latino Leadership Advocacy and Research Organization (CLLARO)

Colorado Succeeds

Colorado Youth Congress (CYC)

Education Reform Now (ERN)

FaithBridge

Our Turn

Stand for Children Colorado

Transform Education Now (TEN)

Together Colorado

Young Aspiring Americans for Social and Political Activism (YAASPA)