



COLORADO
Department of Education
Commissioner of Education

201 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203-1799

Jan. 20, 2021

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Executive Directors,

I hope you all were able to get some rest over the Martin Luther King Jr. holiday weekend. I used some of the time to read and reflect on Dr. King's words, and I found them to be especially meaningful and inspiring right now, as we still have so much work to do to correct inequities that have persisted for too long and re-establish a broad commitment to civil discourse. I haven't emailed you directly for a while—but I thought it was important to share some perspectives on the year ahead and thoughts on the issue of student assessments.

We still have many uncertainties ahead of us as a nation and as an education community as we dive into 2021. My top priority right now is ensuring the health and safety of students and staff while supporting you and your schools with maintaining or returning to in-person learning. I'm thankful that Congress passed an additional stimulus package that will bring \$519 million to Colorado schools in ESSER II funds, along with more in GEER funding. I look forward to seeing the additional support that may be coming from the new administration. I will be finding ways in the days ahead to get your input on the funds that the department has discretion over.

Questions and concerns about student assessments are also top of mind. I wish I could provide more clarity around whether assessments will be given this spring, but the timing of these decisions from the Colorado legislature, the new leaders at the US DOE and also our State Board of Education—are challenging. I know this is frustrating because you all have to plan now. However, I don't think we will have a definitive answer on this before late February, **at the earliest**, given the timelines for the state legislative session (mid-February) and the timing of the confirmation of the new Secretary of Education (not known yet). So, given current laws, and the need to be prepared, **we still have to plan for assessments to be conducted this spring.**

I want to assure you that I understand and empathize with the many valid concerns around assessments this year. I am getting emails, letters and calls from many of you as well as parents and education stakeholders who are asking about assessments and accountability this year. There are many perspectives, and I have held all of these perspectives in my own mind, at the same time. On one hand, it is really important to have an accurate picture of where our students are in their learning. CMAS is the only statewide measure that can provide a comparable measure from before, during and after the pandemic to understand the impacts that the pandemic has had on learning. On the other hand, I know there are competing priorities for limited time. I also hear the valid concerns voiced by some teachers, administrators and parents about the varying needs of our students right now - including the need for more instructional time to make up for missed learning opportunities and the need for more ways to support students' and teachers' mental health.



The COVID-19 Policy Implications Stakeholder Group thought long and hard about all of our assessments, and they developed [solid recommendations for the legislature to consider](#). Given all the considerations mentioned above, they were not able to come to a consensus about whether CMAS ELA and math should be administered. The good news is we have heard agreement (though it is not codified in law yet) from stakeholders and lawmakers that these assessments should NOT be used for accountability purposes. I hope that eases some of the stress around this decision.

If our policymakers decide to move forward with assessments this spring, I hope we can all make the most of it so the results provide students, parents, teachers, districts and the state with a picture of COVID-19 learning impacts to help direct resources and policies to serve our students with the greatest needs. I will continue to work in partnership with our state and federal policymakers to help inform their important decisions, and as always, I welcome your perspectives as we work together toward our common mission of eliminating inequities and ensuring all students receive a quality education.

Thank you for all you are doing during this incredibly challenging time,



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner

