

Rep McCluskey
for Ed Tomorrow



COLORADO
MOUNTAIN COLLEGE

February 11, 2019

RE: Planned Amendment to HB 19-1121 (Early Colleges and ASCENT)

Dear Colleagues in the Education Community,

I write to offer details regarding our proposed plan regarding HB 19-1121, which concerns Early College programs in high schools.

As many know, last session the legislature acted somewhat abruptly to wind-down funding for the fifth year of early college programs. While we understand the Joint Budget Committee's concerns with the fiscal implications of early college programs, this decision had a significant impact on programs operating at Colorado Mountain College that had previously received approval from the State Board of Education.

For the past several years, Colorado Mountain College has worked with its 13 rural school districts to expand college access to students throughout the Western Slope. The results are undeniably positive: since 2014, concurrent enrollment registrations have grown by nearly 50%, college completions are at all-time highs, and the percentage of local students enrolling at the college has reached historic levels. Additionally, the college's enrollment of Latino students—nearly all of whom graduated from high schools in our mountain communities—has nearly doubled. Most impressive, Latino students now lead all students at CMC in retention and completion.

CMC's main concern with the elimination of "fifth-year" early college funding is that the action effectively stunts the progress of innovative joint-degree programs and forces the college and its high partners to unexpectedly retool established curriculums. This may sound simple, but it requires significant effort, especially as our partner schools try to help honor the students already in their programs and reset curriculums for those who will follow. For small schools in small districts, juggling multiple curriculums is a significant task.

The proposal we advanced in section 2 of HB 19-1121, that concerning the prioritization of students completing 24 or more credit hours in programs in high demand, was our attempt to find a way to harmonize the abrupt closing of early college funding and the existing ASCENT program. We were

not trying to harm or crowd out existing ASCENT slots, but rather create a policy that aligns with the Department of Higher Education's strategic goals to increase degree completion and close opportunity gaps. The majority of students enrolled in CMC's early college programs are Latino, and their progress toward degree was greatly enhanced by the availability of early college programs that eliminated barriers and provided constant wrap-around support for these students. Prioritizing students who could graduate within a five-year timeframe seemed consistent with the CCHE's goals and the purpose of the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act.

When HB 19-1121 is heard in committee, we will propose an amendment to strike this section 2, as we never intended to create unnecessary controversy, especially given that our efforts were meant to support some of the most vulnerable students the college serves. We remain hopeful that the General Assembly will find a way to ensure that innovative approaches to merging college degrees with high school programs is supported and encouraged. These kinds of innovative approaches are efficient, effective, and allow students from diverse backgrounds to achieve the dream of college while maintaining the support of their communities and schools.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to be 'Carrie Hauser', written in a cursive style.

Carrie Hauser
President and CEO

cc: Matt Gianneschi, Chief Operating Officer & Chief of Staff
Representative Julie McCluskie
Representative Dylan Roberts
Senator Kerry Donovan
Dr. Angie Paccionne, Executive Director, CDHE
Dr. Katy Anthes, Commissioner of Education, CDE