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Higher Education Supplemental Academic Instruction (HB19-1206)

Testimony to the House Education Committee
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Madame Chair and members of the committee, thank you for this opportunity to testify on behalf of House Bill 1206.

My name is Amanda Valenta and I'm a policy analyst on work and learning at the Bell Policy Center. We provide policymakers, advocates, and the public with reliable resources to create a practical policy agenda that promotes economic mobility for every Coloradan.

Estimates suggest that as early as next year, about three-quarters of Colorado jobs will require at least some postsecondary education or training, but nearly one-third of Colorado's population has no additional education or training after high school. Only 29 percent of Latinx Coloradans and 39 percent of African-American Coloradans have a certificate or degree, compared to 64 percent of white Coloradans. The higher education attainment gap between Latinx and white Coloradans is the second largest in the nation. We have a long way to go to reach our 2025 goal of 66 percent credential attainment for all. But this goal is complicated by the fact that over half of Colorado high school graduates who attend community college are identified as not academically ready for introductory coursework in math and English.

Every year, about one million students begin college in remediation, but research by the Lumina Foundation suggests that traditional (or developmental) remediation fails most students who receive it. Only 20 percent of students at two-year institutions and 36 percent of students at four-year institutions complete their associated gateway courses in math or English. Only 17 percent of students in traditional remediation, who are disproportionately low-income students and students of color, go on to graduate. This means a large proportion of these students are at risk of never earning the credentials required in today's — and tomorrow's — workforce.

High attrition is at least partially due to the fact traditional developmental remediation does not count toward degree requirements, and extra courses mean extra time and money that many students just don't have. This is especially true for students who depend on Pell funding, which is time limited. Higher education must be more accessible and streamlined for these students. Supplemental academic instruction helps students complete required coursework more quickly, by offering additional supports that target learning, retention, and success in introductory courses. Colorado has already demonstrated the benefits of supplemental support with corequisite remediation, which has been shown to accelerate students' time to degree.

Providing additional academic supports to help students complete introductory courses and move on to complete a credential has (at least) a twofold benefit for Colorado. First, these supports will help narrow our state's huge equity gaps in higher education attainment. Second, they will help equip more Coloradans for the jobs of the future, the majority of which will require education beyond high school. Because some of those jobs are already here, we have little time to waste.

Thank you for your time, and I'm happy to answer any questions.