



EQUITY IN EXCELLENCE FOR COLORADO'S FUTURE:

A Policy Audit and Analysis

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FOREWORD

In July 2014, the United States will commemorate the 50th Anniversary of the Civil Rights Act – the most ambitious attempt in American history to repair through policy the social and economic injustices that had been inflicted on African Americans since the Civil War. The emergence of the Civil Rights Act would not have been possible without the courage of Black students in the South to peacefully break the codes of racial separation; the determination of Martin Luther King, Jr., to name the barbarity of Jim Crow apartheid that consigned Blacks to a perpetual state of separate and unequal existence; the stoicism of Rosa Parks as she insisted on the right to sit at the front of the bus; and the thousands of citizens of all races who joined the march for social justice. The enactment of the Civil Rights Act also required, however, the willingness of two U.S. presidents – John F. Kennedy and Lyndon B. Johnson – to speak openly about the ills of racism and to challenge members of both political parties to accept social equality as a moral imperative for the nation. In his now iconic and much quoted speech to the 1965 Howard University graduating class, President Johnson said of the Civil Rights Act and subsequent legislation, “We seek not just legal equity, but human ability; not just equality as a right and a theory, but equality as a fact and equality as a result.”

The Civil Rights Act was a demonstration of moral leadership – an effort by policymakers to end racial injustice and to lay the groundwork for the nation to begin bridging the deep chasms wrought by slavery and segregation. As Johnson noted in his Howard University commencement address, however, the cumulative impact of that history runs deep in our social and economic institutions. And despite much progress in eliminating the formal systems of discrimination since the 1960s, vestiges of them remain all too evident across every indicator of economic and social opportunity. This history is nowhere more evident than in the racially stratified patterns of higher education participation and success, including college enrollment and outcomes; access to highly selective institutions; representation in the fields of science, technology, engineering, and

mathematics; and many other less visible forms of participatory inequality.

Indeed, the great educational and economic divide between racial groups in the U.S. today is a grave reminder that as we go into the second decade of the 21st Century, the “color line” named by W.E.B. Dubois as the “problem of the 20th Century” not only persists, it grows larger. And it will continue to grow if higher education policy fails to name racial equity – not just rhetorically as a goal but transparently as an expected and measurable outcome. Until the 1960s, inequality was planned and intentional, engineered and reinforced through racially discriminatory policies. Today, we run the risk of perpetuating and increasing inequality not through such intentional acts but by enacting policy that in its blindness to race fails to address the underlying structures that systematically limit opportunities for African American, Latino, and American Indian individuals and families.

Through its work with hundreds of college and universities addressing issues of inequity in the structures and policies of higher education, the Center for Urban Education has learned that:

- Language matters. Affirming the right of all students is not a substitute for equity. We have to name race in order to address it.
- Different equity gaps (race, class, gender) have different causes and require different interventions, so clarity in targets and goals is critical.
- Diversity is a necessary but not sufficient condition for achieving equity.
- Disaggregating data is a necessary but not sufficient practice for achieving equity.
- Inequity is an outcome of practices and policies assumed to be race-neutral.

These principles apply equally in practice and in policy; changing outcomes that result from deeply entrenched patterns of inequity require changing taken-for-granted structures and processes. Just as in

medicine, social ills cannot be remedied if they are not first accurately diagnosed and understood.

The purpose of this policy audit is to aid in that diagnosis and understanding by showing where equity is made explicit in Colorado's higher education policies and where there is room to be more intentional about its inclusion. This review of the state's existing policy context has provided the backdrop for implementation of *Equity in Excellence for Colorado's Future* – a one-year project in which teams of innovative faculty and staff from Metropolitan State University of Denver, the University of Colorado Denver, and the Community College of Aurora are conducting in-depth inquiry and planning around ways to improve equity in outcomes for Latino, Black, and American Indian students on their campuses. We urge policymakers and leaders to learn how equity has been included in the state's goals and policy measures and to continue thinking critically about the many more ways in which it could be incorporated, including by learning from these campus teams about the deeply entrenched structural barriers that many students encounter as they pursue a college education.

Like most states, Colorado cannot afford to leave equity in higher education to chance. Recent policy measures aimed at increasing the level of college education in the population and improving higher education access and affordability for undocumented students have demonstrated the commitment of Colorado's policymakers to investing in higher education as the key to the state's civic health and prosperity. The expectations from these reforms, however, will not be realized if policymakers do not intentionally and transparently embed equity, as an expected characteristic of quality, efficiency, and effectiveness.

Policy is a reflection of citizens and their elected officials' vision for the state or the nation. In the anniversary of the Civil Rights Act we should be reminded that reaching a future where we see "equality as a fact and equality a result" requires policy that directly – not implicitly or in coded overtures – outlines a path forward. As this audit shows, Colorado has started down that path in innovative and progressive ways; but – in the spirit of the state's unparalleled mountain wilderness – there are trails yet to blaze.

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INTRODUCTION

In 2013, with funding from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation and the Ford Foundation, the Center for Urban Education (CUE) at the University of Southern California and the Western Interstate Commission for Higher Education (WICHE) launched a two-year project, *Equity in Excellence*, to support the implementation of Colorado's higher education reform agenda. With a focus on the metropolitan Denver area, the project intends to align the state's higher education policies with concrete, equity-focused actions at its public community colleges and four-year institutions. Specifically, during 2013-14, the *Equity in Excellence* project is working to:

- **Guide** state leaders in identifying priorities and articulating specific goals around community college transfer, degree completion, and racial equity.
- **Support** faculty, staff, and administrators in creating benchmarked completion and equity targets that align with the state's goals.
- **Facilitate** the creation of campus action plans that outline concrete steps for reaching those targets.
- **Integrate** campus-level targets into state policy structures and embed equity indicators in the state's ongoing policy reforms.

CUE and WICHE staff launched the project by consulting with key state leaders to identify three public institutions with which to work: Metropolitan State University of Denver; the University of Colorado Denver, and the Community College of Aurora. Soon after, staff formed a project Advisory Board composed of the presidents and provosts of the target institutions as well as staff from the Colorado Department of Higher Education and the Colorado Community College System and other philanthropic and community leaders (see Appendix A for a complete list of the Advisory Board members). In February 2013, staff convened the Advisory Board to seek input and guidance about how the project could most effectively support Colorado's higher education reform agenda. The group also provided feedback about early findings of this policy audit and analysis.

The purpose of this policy audit is to inform project, state, and institutional leaders about current policy and practice in Colorado with respect to equity as they work with CUE to assess and analyze how to better align state policy with equity-focused actions at the institutional level. Specifically, this audit analyzes alignment, gaps, and opportunities in state, system, and institutional policies, as well as the interaction between them, with an eye toward intentional and unintentional outcomes. It provides an external, objective perspective, with the goal of assisting Colorado's state and institutional higher education leaders in designing (or redesigning) policies to achieve the goals laid out in the state's master plan and to make those policies equitable toward all students.

The final phase of the project includes a close collaboration between CUE and the institutions to conduct in-depth data analysis to identify policy and practice areas in need of examination and adjustment so that students, particularly those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups, can be more appropriately and better served.

BACKGROUND

Colorado currently faces a number of demographic and socioeconomic challenges (challenges that are likely to continue into the future) that compel state leaders to focus on college completion, workforce development, and equity issues. According to the Georgetown University Center on Education and the Workforce, 74 percent of all jobs in Colorado (nearly 2.2 million jobs) will require some form of postsecondary training beyond high school in 2020.¹ While 47.5 percent of the working-age adults in the state hold at least an associate's degree (above the national average of 39.4 percent), Colorado still is not projected to meet the educational and workforce needs of the future.² This is in part because the degree attainment rate of young adults (25- to 34-year-olds) is, at 45.8 percent, lower than that of the adult population as a whole. In addition, the historical migration of well-educated people into the state cannot be relied on to continue in perpetuity.³ Further, research suggests that while Colorado will see consistent increases in high school graduates

through 2024-25 (except for a brief period of decline through 2013-14), those gains will primarily be among populations that have not been historically well-served by higher education: Hispanics in particular, and also Black, non-Hispanics.⁴ For Colorado to meet its future educational and workforce needs, the state needs to act now to be more intentional about ensuring that racial/ethnic equity is a goal so that all of its citizens have the opportunity to enter and succeed in postsecondary education.

State- and System-level Higher Education

Colorado's system of higher education consists of 28 public institutions, with 13 four-year and 15 two-year public institutions.⁵ Its four-year colleges and universities are coordinated by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education (CCHE), whose members are appointed by the governor, with implementation responsibilities falling on the Colorado Department of Higher Education (CDHE). CDHE's mission is "to improve the quality of, ensure the affordability of, and promote access to postsecondary education for the people of Colorado. In pursuing its mission, the Department of Higher Education will act as an advocate for the students and institutions of postsecondary education and will coordinate and, as needed, regulate the activities of the state's postsecondary education institutions."⁶ CCHE is considered a regulatory coordinating board with significant budgetary authority.⁷ Overall, Colorado's system of higher education is highly decentralized.

CCHE was established by the Legislature in 1965, replacing an association that met informally to consider matters related to higher education. In 1985 the Legislature gave CCHE increased authority and specific directives through the passage of House Bill 1187. CCHE's current responsibilities include developing long-range plans for an evolving state system of higher education, including:

- Reviewing and approving degree programs.
- Establishing the distribution formula for higher education funding.

- Recommending statewide funding levels to the Legislature.
- Approving institutional capital construction requests.
- Recommending capital construction priorities to the Legislature.
- Developing policies for institutional and facility master plans.
- Administering statewide student financial assistance programs through policy development, program evaluation, and allocation of funds.
- Developing and administering a statewide off-campus (extended studies), community service, and continuing education program.
- Determining institutional roles and missions.
- Establishing statewide enrollment policies and admission standards.
- Conducting special studies, regarding statewide education policy, finance, or effective coordination, as appropriate or directed.⁸

Tuition-setting authority is at the institutional level in Colorado through 2015. Policy states that:

Governing boards have the responsibility and authority for the financial management of their institutions. A major component of sound financial management is the setting of tuition and fees, including refund policies. Since institutions have unique roles and missions and differing student needs, governing boards must consider a number of factors when setting tuition and fees, and when establishing a refund policy. The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (the Commission) has responsibility to exercise oversight to ensure that educational quality and student access are maintained consistent with the role and mission of each institution.⁹

The Colorado Community College System (CCCS) is composed of 13 community colleges that serve more than 162,000 students annually.¹⁰ In addition, CCCS oversees 1,200 secondary and 800 postsecondary

career and technical programs in more than 150 school districts, as well as seven other postsecondary institutions in Colorado.¹¹ The mission of CCCS is:

To provide an accessible, responsive learning environment that facilitates the achievement of educational, professional and personal goals by our students and other members of our communities in an atmosphere that embraces academic excellence, diversity and innovation.¹²

There are also two local district colleges – Aims Community College and Colorado Mountain College – that are separately funded and governed.

In Fall 2012, undergraduate enrollment at the public four-year institutions was 128,393, compared to 103,608 at the public two-year institutions and local district colleges combined.¹³ Within the four-year colleges and universities, Black students comprised 4,512 (3.51 percent) of enrollments, and Hispanic students made up 17,239 (13.43 percent); there were 1,511 (1.18 percent) Native American students.¹⁴ At the two-year and local district colleges, there were 6,522 Black students in Fall 2012, which was about 6.29 percent of enrollments, compared to 18,325 Hispanic students (17.7 percent) and 1,047 (1.01 percent) Native Americans.¹⁵

The Governor and Lieutenant Governor

Governor John Hickenlooper, a Democrat, was first elected in 2010, after having served as the mayor of Denver; Joseph Garcia was elected as lieutenant governor (Colorado elects its governor and lieutenant governor on a single ticket). Terms for both offices are four years, and both are limited to two consecutive terms. In a somewhat unusual arrangement, Garcia also serves as executive director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education.

The Legislature

The Colorado General Assembly is composed of 100 members; during the 2014 legislative session, the Legislature was composed of 35 senators (18 Democrats and 17 Republicans) and 65 representatives in the House (37 Democrats, 28 Republicans).¹⁶ Both the Colorado Senate and House have education committees that address issues

related to K-12 and higher education. Colorado enacted legislative term limits in 1990 that restrict members to eight years in each chamber.¹⁷

In Colorado, the Joint Budget Committee (JBC), the General Assembly’s permanent fiscal and budget review agency, writes the annual appropriations bill (called the Long Bill) for the operations of state government. The JBC has six members: the chair of the Senate Appropriations Committee, along with one majority and one minority member; and the chair of the House Appropriations Committee, plus one majority and one minority member. Traditionally, the Senate elects its JBC members. In the House, however, the speaker appoints the majority party member, and the minority leader appoints the minority party member. The chairs of the Senate and House Appropriations committees alternate as the JBC chair. The JBC analyzes the management, operations, programs, and fiscal needs of the departments of state government (the state Constitution requires a balanced budget). The committee holds hearings and reviews the executive budget requests for each state agency and institution.¹⁸

The Master Plan

According to Colorado statute, on or before September 1, 2012, the CCHE was required to, “develop and submit to the governor and the general assembly a new master plan for Colorado postsecondary education.”¹⁹ Further, CCHE was required to design the master plan to achieve, at a minimum, the following goals.

- Increase the overall number of baccalaureate degrees, associate degrees, and career and technical education certificates issued by the public institutions of higher education in the state, while maintaining accessibility to the institutions, to provide support for economic development and a well-educated workforce for the business community in the state.
- Implement systemic approaches, including coordinated and proven transitional programs, that strengthen the continuity of public education from elementary and secondary

through postsecondary education for traditional and nontraditional students.

- Ensure the long term fiscal stability and affordability of the state system of higher education and ensure the efficient allocation of available state resources to support institutions of higher education while protecting the unique mission of each institution. The allocation shall take into consideration, but need not be limited to, tuition capacity, tuition rates relative to competitive institutions, the state resources available to institutions, funding for high-cost programs, the student and family incomes of students enrolled at institutions, enrollment levels, geographic access to educational opportunities throughout the state, and other issues deemed relevant by the commission.
- Reduce the educational attainment gap between majority and underrepresented populations throughout the state.
- Reduce the geographic disparities in access to and opportunity to complete a broad array of quality higher education and career and technical education programs.
- Address opportunities for students with disabilities, including intellectual disabilities, to participate in postsecondary education.
- Implement strategies that strengthen the link between higher education and economic development and innovation in the state.
- Improve and sustain excellence in career and technical education and undergraduate and graduate degree programs.²⁰

In October 2012 CCHE released its master plan, “Colorado Competes: A Completion Agenda for Higher Education,” which establishes as its primary performance goal to “increase the number of Coloradans aged 25-34 who hold high-quality postsecondary credentials – certificates and degrees – to 66 percent by 2025.”²¹ CCHE further identified three complementary goals:

1. Improving student progress and momentum.

2. Diminishing historical disparities among students from certain populations.
3. Demonstrating the need and justification for improved investments in the postsecondary sector.²²

The master plan is driving comprehensive policymaking and thinking at the state level. Further, this master plan may represent what state strategic plans are more likely to look like in the future. Unlike those of years past in most states, Colorado has abandoned vague language and set specific, attainable targets. A potentially critical component of the master plan involves performance contracts, which are agreed upon and signed by CDHE and the public institutions. Specifically, the performance contracts require the institutions to meet goals in four progress areas, the third of which is particularly relevant to equity:

Goal 1. Increase the attainment of high-quality postsecondary credentials across the academic disciplines and throughout Colorado by at least 1,000 new certificates and degrees each year to meet anticipated workforce demands by 2025.

Goal 2. Improve student success through better outcomes in basic skills education, enhanced student support services and reduced average time to credential for all students.

Goal 3. Enhance access to, and through, postsecondary education to ensure that the system reflects the changing demographics of the state while reducing attainment gaps among students from underserved communities.

Goal 4. Develop resources, through increases in state funding, that will allow public institutions of higher education to meet projected enrollment demands while promoting affordability, accessibility and efficiency.²³

As demonstrated in the state statute requiring the development of a master plan and in the master plan itself, Colorado recognizes the need to serve all students and close achievement gaps and has set these as priority goals. The challenge

is in transforming these goals into actions and outcomes, but the environment is clearly ripe for further work to align policies and practices to these goals. Specifically, the master plan requires that the admissions and remedial education policies be revised by July 1, 2014. The process for revision is well underway and is hopefully informed by the data, outcomes, and recommendations of the *Equity in Excellence* project.

Selected Institutions

Equity in Excellence is working collaboratively with three public institutions in Colorado: Metropolitan State University of Denver (MSU Denver); the University of Colorado Denver (CU Denver), and the Community College of Aurora (CCA). These institutions were selected for three primary reasons: their urban setting; the student body composition – all serve a high proportion of students of color and first-generation students; and the high rate of student flow between them.

MSU Denver is a comprehensive baccalaureate institution that offers master’s degrees. State law dictates that it have modified open admissions standards, with the exception of nontraditional students defined as those who are at least 20 years of age; for these individuals, the admissions requirement is a high school diploma, GED, or equivalent.²⁴ MSU Denver serves approximately 22,000 students (22,316 in Fall 2013), about 93 percent of whom are from the Denver metro area.²⁵ Approximately 32 percent of MSU Denver’s students are Pell Grant recipients. In Fall 2013, about 32.8 percent were students of color.²⁶ Notably, at least since Fiscal Year 2006-07, MSU Denver has consistently received the most transfer students of any of the public institutions in Colorado.²⁷ In 2004-05 MSU Denver (then called Metropolitan State College) served as a pilot college in a project managed by CUE and WICHE to field test a streamlined version of the Equity Scorecard – a process and a data tool that combines a theoretical framework with practical strategies to initiate institutional change to achieve equitable outcomes for students of color – and to determine the feasibility of implementing it in the Western region.²⁸

CU Denver is an urban comprehensive undergraduate and graduate research university with selective admissions standards.²⁹ It consists of two campuses: the Denver Campus and the Anschutz Medical Campus. In Fall 2013 CU Denver served 17,729 students, including 10,169 undergraduates (57 percent of the total); the Denver Campus alone served 14,023 students (9,736 undergraduates).³⁰ Thirty-five percent of undergraduates at CU Denver (both campuses) were students of color; on the Denver Campus, 49 percent of freshmen were students of color and 36 percent of undergraduates were first-generation students.³¹

Founded in 1983, CCA has two campuses – Centre Tech and Lowry – located in Aurora and Denver, respectively.³² In Fall 2012, it served 8,166 students (unduplicated headcount), and about 53 percent were minority students.³³ An innovative, well-respected program at this institution is the partnership between CCA and the University of Colorado College of Nursing, which offers an integrated pathway to earn a bachelor of science degree in nursing while also earning an associate of general studies from CCA.³⁴

AUDIT AND ANALYSIS

The purpose of this policy audit is to inform project, state, and institutional leaders about the current policy environment in Colorado with respect to equity as they assess and analyze how to better align state policy with equity-focused actions at the institutional level. Specifically, this audit analyzes alignment, gaps, and opportunities in state, system, and institutional policies, as well as the interaction between them, with an eye toward intentional and unintentional outcomes. It provides an external, objective perspective and intends to assist Colorado’s state and institutional higher education leaders in designing (or redesigning) policies to achieve the goals laid out in the state’s master plan make those policies equitable toward all students, particularly those from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups.

For the purposes of this audit, the definition of equity is reflected in two ways:

1. Race is explicit in the policy instrument (i.e., in terms of goals and intended outcomes).
2. Performance indicators are disaggregated by race and ethnicity.

To conduct this audit, WICHE staff examined state and institutional laws and policies of CDHE, CCCS (which governs the Community College of Aurora), the University of Colorado, and MSU Denver. Staff examined these policies in an attempt to identify strong examples of policy attention being paid to equity; strength of compliance to policies that are equity-minded; key policy areas that are “color-blind” or silent toward issues of equity; and organizational policies or procedures that are examples of indirect institutionalized discrimination (unintentionally causing negative impacts).³⁵ Staff also conducted interviews with and sought feedback from key leaders and decision makers.

The audit focuses on three primary areas of policy interest – academic, finance/financial aid, and student services so that as Colorado’s Master Plan is implemented and the state’s ambitious higher education reform agenda is realized, policy leaders can put into place concrete, equity-focused actions. Accountability and data are of utmost importance to the audit and this project; as such, examples of promising practices and potential gaps are woven into each of the policy areas of interest.

Academic Affairs

Within academic affairs policy, there are four key areas of focus that are important to examine from an equity perspective: admissions, remedial (developmental) education, transfer, and postsecondary concurrent enrollment.

Admissions. Colorado’s state-level admissions policy was first adopted in 1986 and established minimum admissions standards for first-time freshmen and transfer students at all public baccalaureate institutions (this policy does not apply to the state’s community colleges, which are by law and tradition open access institutions).³⁶ The long-standing admissions policy outlines four goals, including one (the fourth) that specifically relates to equity.

1. Establish admission standards based on student performance and differentiated institutional role and mission while ensuring broad access to undergraduate programs with minimum duplication.
2. Set clear performance expectations and communicate those expectations to prospective students.
3. Reaffirm the principle that the opportunity to be admitted to a state-supported institution of higher education in Colorado must be earned, while assuring that the opportunity to enter the state-supported system of higher education is provided for Colorado residents.
4. Encourage diversity by supporting the admission of applicants from underrepresented groups, applicants with special talents, and applicants with disabilities.³⁷

While the fourth goal of the admissions policy is clearly equity-minded policy and is important in establishing a strong foundation for institutional practice, it is broadly stated; there is no adequate way to measure strength of compliance or progress toward that goal within the policy.

Importantly, Colorado does not have race-based admissions. Instead, students are admitted to the baccalaureate institutions on the basis of an index calculated from two components: a student’s high school GPA or class rank and performance on a standardized test. Transfer students are eligible for admissions based on GPA.³⁸

The admissions policy also includes a process (commonly referred to as “windows”) that allows institutions to admit a certain percentage of applicants on the basis of criteria other than the CCHE freshmen index or transfer GPA (this percentage is determined by CCHE). According to state policy, the size of the academic window varies among institutions.³⁹ Specifically, with the exception of the Colorado School of Mines (10 percent), University of Colorado at Boulder (14 percent), and Colorado State University (16 percent), most

Colorado institutions have a maximum window at either 19 or 20 percent.⁴⁰ Analysis suggests that the window is being used by a higher proportion of minority and male students.⁴¹ As such, the smaller academic windows at the more selective institutions may be having a negative impact on access for underrepresented students.

In response to the statutory requirement to review the admissions policy, CDHE's Admission and Transfer Policy Review task force that began meeting in May 2012 recommended key changes to the policy.⁴² The changes that were approved in December 2013 (and will go into effect in 2019), include:

- Elimination of the index score.
- Emphasis on demonstrations of competency.
- Guaranteed admission for community college graduates.
- Incorporation of new statewide assessments (Colorado Measures of Academic Success) in 2014-15.⁴³

While the traditional index score will be eliminated, a new tool is currently being developed that is intended to allow students and high school counselors to identify campuses that might academically be the best fit.⁴⁴ As this tool is developed, there is an important opportunity to also build in a mechanism that can help ensure equity at Colorado's postsecondary institutions.

Remedial Education. Generally speaking, remedial education and admissions policy are closely linked, yet not always closely aligned. This is demonstrated in Colorado's current policy and initially directed by the state legislature through House Bill 12-1155. Remediation in the state of Colorado is provided by the two-year institutions, and they may receive general fund support to offer basic skills training.⁴⁵ With the exception of MSU Denver and CU Denver (that have been permitted to offer co-requisite courses as an alternative), four-year institutions may offer remedial education by contracting with a two-year institution or by offering it on a cash-funded basis.⁴⁶ In other words, when a four-year institution admits a student who needs remedial

education, the institution has been forced to send the student elsewhere to get it. This is problematic because the four-year institutions often lose track of students who are "sent elsewhere," but can still be held accountable for serving them, even if they never set foot on the campus. A second problem is that this process can create a significant barrier for first-generation students or students of color. These students may not have much, if any, experience in navigating the college pathway and may get lost in the shuffle or get discouraged from continuing.

The context for remedial education has been in a state of flux recently and will remain so in the near future, in part due to the pending deadline for policy revision in July 2014. Through two externally-funded grants – one from Complete College America and the other from the U.S. Department of Labor Trade Adjustment Assistance Community College and Career Training (TAACCCT) Grant Program – Colorado has been reforming its entire developmental education system.

In 2011, the CCCS's Developmental Education Taskforce was charged by CCCS President Nancy McCallin "to review developmental education practices throughout the Colorado Community College System and make recommendations for the System to become the premier purveyor of developmental education in more streamlined and efficient ways, resulting in greater student success."⁴⁷ The taskforce, which was comprised of 35 developmental education faculty, campus and system leaders, and other experts from around the state, was asked to complete five activities.

1. Review and clarify the purpose of developmental education and analyze implications for policy and practice resulting from a clarified purpose.
2. Review current system policies and practices related to developmental education and propose revisions that will promote greater student success in alignment with sound academic principles and practice.

3. Investigate and analyze measures of success, data reports and studies on success of developmental education students.
4. Examine structures for developmental education, highlighting innovative and successful strategies, improving the student experience and identifying barriers to success.
5. On the basis of a comprehensive review, recommend broad strategies and specific initiatives related to developmental education that should be pursued by Colorado's Community College System Colleges, leading to enhanced outcomes for student learning and success.⁴⁸

Importantly, equity was not mentioned explicitly in the charge to the taskforce. As such, it is omitted from the redesign recommendation. There is ample opportunity, however, as implementation moves forward, to incorporate equity more explicitly.

Historically, Colorado has provided three levels of remedial education. Technically, the state continues to do so, but recently CDHE indicated that the lowest level (030) in reality reflects a middle school-level curriculum and therefore is ineligible for federal financial aid. In practice, this means that institutions may still offer it, but most or all do not. As such, those students who do not place above that level are provided what the state refers to as a “soft landing,” which is a non-credit option for students to prepare to be reassessed.⁴⁹ The decision for how to deliver the content remains with the institutions and may include, but is not limited to, referral to Adult Basic Education programs, boot camp, Core Skills Mastery, Assessment preparation, My Foundations Lab (MFL), Aleks, MOOCs, or tutoring.⁵⁰

Another major revision concerns how developmental education is being delivered in Colorado and is reflected in English and reading as well as mathematics. In English and reading, postsecondary institutions now offer an accelerated model that provides students with an opportunity to enter a 100 level course no later than the second term of

enrollment.⁵¹ The model incorporates options for institutions to select between different types of courses, including co-requisite, integrated reading and writing across disciplines, and integrated reading and writing within one or more of four discipline strands (communication, arts and humanities, social science, and science) depending on level of placement.⁵² In math, which has not yet been implemented at the institutions, colleges will offer pathways to 100 level math courses, and with appropriate advising, students will choose their path based on their career or major area of interest.⁵³ Unlike English and reading, there will be no soft landing. Students will move through either a STEM preparation track or a quantitative literacy track.⁵⁴

In English and reading as well as math, two important challenges remain. First, Colorado's comprehensive redesign will require significant faculty professional development and hiring and training of additional advising staff. Because African Americans and Latinos/as are overrepresented in developmental/remedial education courses and their rates of success are very low, the CCCS should provide professional development on culturally-responsive practices as part of the its developmental education redesign. The Equity Scorecard activities at the Community College of Aurora, particularly within the mathematics department, provide a model for professional development that engages instructors and staff in assessing and adjusting their own practices.

Second, appropriately placing students into credit-bearing courses is a challenge that states and institutions are facing all over the country. A few places, like North Carolina, for instance, have replaced common placement examinations (e.g., Accuplacer, COMPASS) with alternative strategies, such as high school grade point average (GPA), which are expected to more accurately place students into appropriate courses.

As of December 2013, CCHE adopted a revised remedial education policy that will allow institutions to accept six different assessments for determining if a first-time undergraduate is college ready in reading, writing, and math; allow for differentiation of the

requirements for math based on the prerequisite skills needed for required courses within a student's declared program of study; and a change in cut scores for the accepted assessments.⁵⁵ Identifying effective strategies and implementing them quickly and equitably at both the four- and two-year campuses will be critical to the success of all placement reforms.

There are two areas of strength concerning remedial education in Colorado. First, the state requires institutions to provide data about basic skills, and these data are disaggregated by race/ethnicity. Specifically, these data include a description of the students; school districts from which students graduated; year of high school graduation; areas requiring basic skills instruction; and credit hours earned in remedial courses. Analyses are conducted that look specifically at gender, race/ethnicity, and adults by race/ethnicity. Second, state policy states that students have the responsibility to take the required remedial coursework no later than the end of their freshman year (within the first 30 semester hours).⁵⁶ Institutions must ensure that enrolled first-time undergraduate students take placement exams in mathematics, writing, and reading and inform students who are in need of remediation of that requirement.⁵⁷ This addresses the tendency of students to delay taking courses that are difficult or intimidating until later in their college career. In remediation, where students of color are disproportionately represented, time is the enemy: the likelihood of success decreases the longer one waits to tackle a challenging subject.

Transfer. Colorado's statewide transfer policy is often touted as one to emulate, as it is comprehensive in its inclusion of such aspects as a student bill of rights (see box), common course numbering, a guaranteed general education curriculum, two-plus-two transfer agreements, and a student appeals process.⁵⁹ Importantly, its comprehensive goal is to ensure not only "access to undergraduate degree programs" but also to "facilitate completion of degree requirements."⁶⁰ Many states focus on the access component, and Colorado takes the important next step by emphasizing success.

Student Bill of Rights

The general assembly hereby finds that students enrolled in public institutions of higher education shall have the following rights:

- A. Students should be able to complete their associate of arts and associate of science degree programs in no more than 60 credit hours or their baccalaureate programs in no more than 120 credit hours unless there are additional degree requirements recognized by the commission;**
- B. A student can sign a two-year or four-year graduation agreement that formalizes a plan for that student to obtain a degree in two or four years, unless there are additional degree requirements recognized by the commission;**
- C. Students have a right to clear and concise information concerning which courses must be completed successfully to complete their degrees;**
- D. Students have a right to know which courses are transferable among the state public two-year and four-year institutions of higher education;**
- E. Students, upon completion of core general education courses, regardless of the delivery method, should have those courses satisfy the core course requirements of all Colorado public institutions of higher education;**
- F. Students have a right to know if courses from one or more public higher education institutions satisfy the students' degree requirements;**
- G. A student's credit for the completion of the core requirements and core courses shall not expire for 10 years from the date of initial enrollment and shall be transferrable.⁵⁸**

At the recommendation of CDHE's Admission and Transfer Policy Review task force, CCHE adopted a key change related to transfer in December 2013. Beginning in the 2019-20 academic year, students who successfully complete an associate's degree at an accredited in-state institution will be guaranteed admission to one of the state's public four-year colleges or universities.⁶¹ Students will be required to have completed all community college courses with a grade of C- or better and meet the receiving institution's minimum grade point average.⁶² This change is expected to further strengthen the transfer pathway in Colorado.

Finally, in April 2014, with partial funding from Lumina Foundation, Colorado launched a program called, "Degree Within Reach," that is designed to allow students who have transferred from a CCCS campus to a Colorado university to combine credits from both institutions and apply them toward an associate's degree.⁶³ Given that the program is in its infancy, the impact of this new effort on underrepresented students remains to be seen.

While there are many strong elements in the transfer policy, there are two primary areas that are ripe for further examination and adjustment. First, policy is silent on issues of equity and therefore may be missing important opportunities to address gaps. Second, there has been no comprehensive evaluation of policy effectiveness. Research suggests that Colorado is not alone in this lack of analysis and that in fact most states do not systematically evaluate the outcomes of their transfer policies.⁶⁴ While this lack of analysis is arguably a direct result of data challenges associated with tracking student transfers, this gap is in need of significant attention, particularly given the goals laid out in the state's master plan.

Postsecondary Concurrent Enrollment. Historically, the beneficiaries of postsecondary concurrent enrollment programs (generally defined as opportunities for high school students to earn college credit either by taking college courses at their high school or at a postsecondary institution) have been high-achieving students. Colorado has

been quite aggressive in recent years by intentionally expanding the mission of concurrent enrollment programs in the state to serve a wider range of students, particularly those who have historically low college participation rates.⁶⁵ Specifically through the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act, ASCENT (the Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment) program allows seniors to remain enrolled in high school and take a fifth year consisting entirely of college classes as long as they have met all of their high school graduation requirements, have taken 12 credit hours of college classes prior to the end of their senior year, and are considered college/career ready.⁶⁶ Further, the state conducts annual analyses of the concurrent enrollment programs with disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity. Overall, about 22 percent of all 11th and 12th graders in public high schools in Colorado participate in concurrent enrollment, which is an increase of about 12 percent between 2011-12 and 2012-13.⁶⁷ Data also suggest increases in minority participation with an increase of 22.1 percent (525 to 641 students) over the same time period among Black students; 37.3 percent (2,744 to 3,767 students) among Hispanic students; but a 6.7 percent decline (105 to 98 students) among Native Americans.⁶⁸

Finance/Financial Aid

In 2004, the Colorado General Assembly established the College Opportunity Fund (COF), a system that funds higher education institutions in the state through student vouchers (or stipends), fee-for-service contracts, and performance contracts.⁶⁹ The performance contracts were negotiated between the institutions and CDHE to ensure accountability while allowing for greater institutional autonomy and deregulation. The fee-for-service contracts were designed to pay institutions to meet specified state needs not covered by the stipend (e.g., graduate education).⁷⁰

The voucher, or stipend, is the most distinctive aspect of Colorado's financing structure. Instead of the more common method of funding institutions directly based on enrollment (or more recently on outcomes), current state policy provides stipends to

all lawfully present (U.S. citizens or legal permanent residents) Colorado residents to use to offset their in-state tuition costs at public (and eligible private) higher education institutions.⁷¹ To receive a stipend, all students must apply and be accepted into the COF program.⁷² While in philosophy COF was presumed to increase access to underrepresented groups when it was created, research showed that in practice the share of enrollment represented by students of color actually declined over time. Further, until recently, as part of this application process, students were required to produce a valid form of identification and “execute an affidavit stating that they are a United States citizen, legal permanent resident, or otherwise lawfully present in the country pursuant to federal law.”⁷³ The problem in practice with this policy had been that there was a delay of one to several days in the verification process; this served as an unnecessary barrier to nontraditional or first-generation students, even when they were lawfully present.⁷⁴ Often nontraditional or first-generation students applied for the COF late, and even a one- or two-day delay in being accepted into the program was a deterrent to college enrollment.

In 2013, the Colorado legislature passed SB 33 (commonly referred to as the ASSET bill), which accomplished two objectives. First, it provided in-state tuition to undocumented students provided they attended a public or private high school in Colorado for at least three years immediately preceding the date of graduation or GED completion; are admitted to a Colorado institution or attend an institution of higher education under a reciprocity agreement; have lawful immigration status or if not, sign an affidavit stating that they have applied for lawful presence or will apply as soon as eligible to do so.⁷⁵ Second, it addressed the gap identified above related to proving lawful presence as related to COF by providing students who fall under the ASSET bill, with an exception to having to prove lawful presence to receive educational services or benefits.⁷⁶

Simultaneously, Colorado has been slowly transitioning to an outcomes-based funding model. Specifically, the state will award funding (in Colorado’s case, 25 percent of the amount by

which the general fund appropriation for the state system of higher education exceeds \$650 million) to each governing board a portion of the performance funding amount in a given fiscal year based on the success demonstrated by the institutions in meeting the goals and expectations outlined in their respective performance contracts.⁷⁷ Each institution has agreed upon their performance measures that correspond to the four goals described on page 4.

The 2014 legislative session, however, created an interesting dynamic between the speaker of the house (Representative Mark Ferrandino) and the executive director of CDHE (also the lieutenant governor), who are of the same political party, related to the financing of higher education in the state. Indicating his frustration with what he perceived as a slow transition of the current funding process to an outcomes-based funding model, the speaker introduced HB 1319, which in its original form, intended to fund colleges and universities based on a formula driven by alternative performance metrics.⁷⁸ Opponents were concerned about “creating winners and losers among universities and colleges, disrupting current initiatives of the Colorado Commission on Higher Education and about whether the bill really proposed significant change.”⁷⁹ In April, however, the bill passed the house easily after Speaker Ferrandino significantly reworked the bill.⁸⁰ The responsibilities continue to reside within CCHE and will take effect in Fiscal Year 2016. The key components include:

- Significantly changing the fee-for service components of Colorado’s current statute.
- Increasing the amount of the College Opportunity Fund stipend for eligible undergraduate students enrolled in institutions who are Pell-eligible.
- Requiring the general assembly’s annual appropriation to the College Opportunity Fund on behalf of eligible undergraduate students to be at least 57.5 percent of the sum of the total state appropriation for the budget year, specialized education fee-for service contracts, and direct grants to local district colleges and area vocational schools.⁸¹

With respect to financial aid, Colorado redesigned its need-based financial aid allocation method in 2013. Specifically, the new model for undergraduate need-based aid includes:

- Targeting allocations to Pell-eligible students to include both part- and full-time students.
- Eliminating financial “tiers” among institutions (moving to “flat” or common award levels).
- Introducing progressive award “steps” to incentivize and promote retention and momentum.
- Introducing financial “disincentives” for continuing students who do not complete in a timely manner.
- Creating greater year-over-year predictability for financial aid administrators.
- Maintaining institutional flexibility to award state grant aid to students currently receiving awards.
- Including a “hold harmless” provision for the first year, so no institution is cut from Fiscal Year 2013.
- Moving to using one year of data rather than three years with an increase or an average, to fund actual enrollments and increase predictability from one year to the next.⁸²

In 2014, state policymakers and higher education leaders again devoted significant attention to state financial aid. Together, Governor Hickenlooper’s budget request and the College Affordability Act (SB 1) represents a historic increase in state financial aid dollars.⁸³ In March 2014, CCHE further refined the method for distributing state need-based financial aid by tying awards more closely to the amount of available new aid dollars.⁸⁴ The guiding principles behind the amended formula includes the completion incentive philosophy, a high value on predictability, and the reduction in the funding swings for the institutions.⁸⁵ The new approach called, “rate of change,” ties the grade level increment to available funding and provides a “soft landing” for institutions that may lose Pell-eligible students; it also includes a mechanism to limit growth.⁸⁶ For Fiscal Year 2014-15, the financial aid increase ensures at least a 20

percent increase in financial aid dollars for all public and private, non-profit institutions in the state.⁸⁷ Lastly, an additional \$5 million will be spent on work-study and an additional \$5 million on restoring merit aid.⁸⁸ While policymakers disagreed about many of the details, there was a great deal of good news for low-income students in a state that has not historically supported them very well.

Student Services

Policy related to student services in Colorado is only addressed at the state level through the aforementioned Student Bill of Rights; no institutions have any written policies that have implications for equity. A strong policy like this at the state level is intended to guide practice at the institutions. It is important in terms of creating a level playing field for all students and in clearly articulating what students can expect during their educational pathway. It is, however, a “color-blind” policy that does not pay particular attention to student equity as it relates to minority or first-generation students. Focusing on this area as well is critical to the success of underrepresented students.

POLICY CONSIDERATIONS

Colorado is widely known as a state policy leader in many areas. The state is actively involved in nationally-recognized efforts that are and have been working toward national college degree attainment goals, including Complete College America, Core to College, and the National Governors Association’s Complete to Compete Initiative, that drive much of the innovative thinking that happens in the state. The adoption of a new master plan further elevated the state onto the national stage as a leader to watch. Yet, in reviewing Colorado’s state, system, and institutional policies, there is room for improvement when specifically considering equity. As policies and practices are examined and revised at all levels, the following should be considered:

- **Adjust CCHE’s roles and responsibilities to more explicitly incorporate issues of equity.**

CCHE should consider adjusting its roles and responsibilities to more explicitly call attention to issues of equity. For instance, within the context

of an “evolving state system of higher education,” CCHE could require special studies to include data to be disaggregated by race/ethnicity or CCHE could request an annual report on the status of equity in postsecondary education in Colorado.

- **Conduct comprehensive institutional policy audits to ensure that institutional policies and practices are aligned to the new, revised state policies with specific consideration paid to equity.**

The state policy environment over the past two years in Colorado has been changing fast and furiously. The state has laid out new goals that should drive the direction and thinking of the higher education system for years to come. As such, each institution in the state should conduct a policy and practice audit to ensure that it is compliant with and equipped to meet the goals laid out in the performance contracts when the trigger point for funding is reached. Further, many of these new policies could promote racial equity if they were buttressed with more explicit language and set more clear expectations for specific equity outcomes.

- **Within the newly revised admissions policy, devise a more concrete way to adequately measure strength of compliance toward a more explicit focus on equity and create ways to communicate that rationale to all stakeholders.**

The previous policy was weak because it was vague and without measurable outcomes. Equity is often left as an implied value because the sensitivities around issues of race make it difficult for people to talk about phenomena such as racial inequality directly and assert goals and strategies that are explicit in their intent to remediate inequity. Policymakers and other high level actors have the power to use discourse to normalize equity and treat it as a “standard operating procedure” or an essential element of institutional quality and effectiveness. The revision process for the admissions policy is well underway, but as the final details are decided and implemented, to ensure more equitable outcomes for students, the policy should include explicit equity goals, an adequate way to measure compliance, and effective ways to communicate these strategies to all.

- **Develop the new admissions tool with specific attention to equity.**

During the transition period from the traditional index admissions score to the new tool designed for students and high school counselors to identify campuses that might be the best fit academically, higher education and K-12 education leaders should work collaboratively to develop a tool that helps ensure equity and does not create unintended, negative consequences, particularly in determining the meaning of “academic best fit.”

- **Consider alternative, multiple indicators of college readiness to create a fairer, more equitable system of college placement.**

Colorado is one of the few states in the Western region to boldly tackle the challenge of redesigning developmental education. The country will be watching the outcomes of the new system that has the potential to benefit students, institutions, and the state in important ways. As the redesign is implemented, the CCCS should consider alternative, multiple indicators of college readiness. Evidence suggests that current placement examinations alone may not be adequate for placement into college-level courses; other factors perhaps in combination, including high school grade point average (GPA) and the new Common Core State Standards assessments, should also be considered.

- **Conduct faculty professional development and training that includes culturally-responsive practices related to the newly redesigned remedial education strategies at the two-year campuses.**

As noted, the redesigned remedial education system will require significant faculty professional development and hiring as well as training of additional advising staff. Identifying effective strategies and implementing them quickly and equitably at the campuses will be critical to the success of the effort. Because African Americans and Latinos/as are overrepresented in remedial education courses, and their rates of success are very low, CCCS should provide professional development and training that includes a focus on culturally-responsive

practices. The Equity Scorecard activities at the Community College of Aurora, particularly within the mathematics department, provide a professional development model that engages instructors and staff in assessing and adjusting their own practices.

- **Conduct annual analysis at the state level related to college transfer patterns and outcomes when possible (including disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity), disseminate reports to better inform policymaking and decisions, and consider policies that further incentivize successful transfer.**

Colorado should be commended for its intentional and consistent use of data with respect to developmental education and postsecondary concurrent enrollment options. It is one of the few states that annually reports data about these two key areas that affect all students and disaggregates those data by race/ethnicity. Despite the focus on these two areas, largely due to the very difficult data challenges associated with tracking transfer students, there is no comprehensive statewide data analysis related to student transfer. Comprehensive, annual reports on student transfer patterns could better inform state, system, and institutional policymaking and identify areas where students from underrepresented racial and ethnic groups may need further support given the higher rates of transfer typically seen in these populations. State and institutional leaders should explore creative ways to track the progress of these students (the *Equity in Excellence* project is one example at the institutional level of doing such an analysis) and consider policy and practice strategies (similar to the recently approved guaranteed admissions policy) that can further incentivize the state and all institutions to work toward seamless transfer.

- **Consider adopting and implementing postsecondary concurrent enrollment policy that further promotes equity.**

Colorado has an established commitment to postsecondary concurrent enrollment, including an expansion to a wider range of students. Coupled

with strong data collection and analysis, the state is in a strong position to take this a step further by adopting and implementing additional policies that promote and support equity-minded goals and outcomes through postsecondary concurrent enrollment. Expanding these programs to more schools and more students throughout the state would be an important next step.

- **Conduct annual analysis at the state level related to the newly designed state financial aid program that includes disaggregation of data by race/ethnicity.**

Colorado's innovative need-based financial aid program provides another important and unique opportunity for the state to assess policy impact on underrepresented students. Not only can lessons learned help fine tune the program in the future so that needy students can be most effectively served, but they can provide valuable insights to others who might consider such a policy in an effort to more efficiently utilize state funds.

- **Consider adopting and implementing equity-minded student services policy at the institutional level that will help students succeed in order to meet institutional and state goals.**

There appear to be very few policies related to student services and what does exist does not speak to equity. Students of color and first-generation students tend to need and utilize student services throughout the educational process. Moving forward, the state and institutions should consider the findings of the CUE/institutional data analysis and adopt relevant student services policies that will address the gaps identified to better serve all students.

For more information, see: http://cue.usc.edu/partners/colorado_excellence_in_equity.html

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APPENDIX A. EQUITY IN EXCELLENCE ADVISORY BOARD MEMBERS

Geri Anderson

(Former) Vice President and Provost
Colorado Community College System

Gregory Anderson

(Former) Dean
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

Linda Bowman

Lecturer, Higher Education Program
Morgridge College of Education
University of Denver

Donald Elliman

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Matt Gianneschi

(Former) Vice President of Policy and Programs, and Director
of the Postsecondary and Workforce Development Institute
Education Commission of the States
(Former) Deputy Executive Director
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Stephen Jordan

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