



February 1, 2021

Dear Governor Polis,

Thank you for your leadership in Colorado during the last year of COVID-19. We appreciate your commitment to making decisions in the best interest of all Coloradans. Around the country and world, Colorado has been a leader in COVID-19 testing and identifying clear priorities for the initial steps of the vaccine roll out. By focusing on those 70+, we are proud that Colorado is first vaccinating those in our communities who are most at risk. We are also pleased to hear the state vaccination program will soon expand to other targeted populations.

We respectfully request that targeted employees at institutions of higher education also be included in the definition of “frontline workers in education” relative to level 1B, as has been done in about half the states. Access to in-person K-12 and early childhood education is of course critical to students across the state. Prioritizing the health of educators is essential to the safe reopening of schools and will also allow many parents to return to work. In this vein, we respectfully ask that you include higher education in 1B for similar reasons K-12 is included. Being able to vaccinate faculty and staff as part of “frontline workers in education” ensures our ability to provide more face-to-face higher education and services that are vital to our students and communities.

In Fall 2020, our faculty and staff served over 235,000 students across Colorado; we continue to serve our missions to educate the next generation of Coloradans in the spring semester. Many of our institutions have offered significant numbers of in-person courses, research and academic labs, and studios throughout the academic year, which has placed large segments of our faculties on the front lines during the pandemic. Although a switch to teaching many of our courses online has been successful despite challenges, it is in-person education and activity that help our students and communities thrive. Online education is an effective modality, but the disruption of in-person learning opportunities has discouraged many students from advancing toward their educational goals, and negatively impacted the availability of the highly skilled workforce Colorado needs. Further, on-line education and the corresponding need for adequate technology infrastructure has a disproportionate negative impact on at-risk populations, including under-represented minorities, first-generation, and low-income students. Excluding these groups from a college education can have a multi-generational impact on their earning power and economic advancement. Colorado institutions of higher education are critical partners within their communities, significantly contributing to business, financial and social ecosystems.

We know that there are many high school seniors who chose not to attend college this year and 2021 seniors may do the same. The long-term impacts on these students are unknown, but research suggests that the longer they wait to go to college, the less successful they will be. This dynamic will impact the workforce of tomorrow.

We thank you for your leadership and the engagement of your team during these challenging times, as well as the higher education accommodations you and CDPHE have worked to develop collaboratively with us. As you know, our institutions across the state are doing all we can to support vaccination clinics, provide workers, and lend our faculty expertise to ensure that Colorado leads the country in vaccine uptake. We appreciate your consideration.

Thank you,

Tony Frank, Chancellor, *Colorado State University System*
Leah L. Bornstein, President, *Aims Community College*
Greg Salsbury, President, *Western Colorado University*
Charles G. Lief, President, *Naropa University*
Janine Davidson, President, *Metropolitan State University of Denver*
Randy Johnson, Executive Director, *Emily Griffith Technical College*
Rev. John P. Fitzgibbons, S.J., President, *Regis University*
Paul Johnson, President, *Colorado School of Mines*
Mike Edmonds and Robert G. Moore, Acting Co-Presidents, *Colorado College*
Cheryl D. Lovell, President, *Adams State University*
Jeremy Haefner, Chancellor, *University of Denver*
Carrie Besnette Hauser, President, *Colorado Mountain College*
Joe Garcia, Chancellor, *Colorado Community College System*
Andy Feinstein, President, *University of Northern Colorado*
Colleen Walker, Chief Executive Officer, *Auraria Higher Education Center*
Tom Stritikus, President, *Fort Lewis College*
Donald W. Sweeting, President, *Colorado Christian University*
Mark R. Kennedy, President, *University of Colorado System*

cc: Lisa Kaufmann, Chief of Staff for Governor Polis
Angie Paccione, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education
Jill Hunsaker Ryan, Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment
Ben Boggs, Chief of Staff to the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Higher Education
Mara Brosy-Wiwchar, Chief of Staff to the Executive Director of the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment