

Latino Coalition of Weld County: Prop. 119 not the answer to underfunded K-12 education system

- Greeley Tribune guest columns
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The Latino Coalition of Weld County has researched and taken a position on the Colorado 119 proposal.

This proposal, also known as the Learning Enrichment and Academic Progress Program (LEAP), is a voting issue on the 2021 State Election Ballot. Ballot issue 119 would provide after and out of school services to Eligible children, defined as children who are at least five years of age and no older than 17 years, and who are eligible for admission to Colorado public schools.

After research and discussion, the Latino Coalition of Weld County (LCWC) initiated a vote of its Directors, to determine support or opposition for the issue. A majority decision to oppose this measure prevailed.

Transparency and accountability are key to K-12 funding. Closing the achievement gap is very deliberate work for each individual child.

Benchmarks and testing work together, to give an accurate view of student progress. Careful assessment and accountability is a core requirement for all public schools.

The work relies on transparency and accountability, not only for student educational advancement, but also for much needed funding received through grants. Although Initiative

119 gives a list of qualifying services, there is little elucidation in the measure that explains how these services would specifically close the achievement gap, for children in poverty.

While we agree the services proposed would be beneficial for children, we cannot help but notice that details on specific goals, carefully analyzed achievement benchmarks and accountability practices are absent in the text. We determined this Initiative would have been easier to accept if it's designated purpose was for extracurricular beneficial funds, and had not tried to carry the weight of arduous goals without a thought out plan, such as closing the achievement gap.

However, we feel that the purpose of these funds would have more success within the coffers of the already established State-wide Public School system, not in the hands of for-profit agencies.

We see many ideas come forward from a middle class view. It seems like a great idea to have funds for additional services for children in poverty. Yet, we are reminded that some of the biggest challenges for families in poverty have been transportation and access.

Many families in our community work two or three jobs to make ends meet, and adding additional services outside of the public school setting, that require families to figure out afternoon transportation and evening meals, will greatly limit the ability to access these services, if given outside of the public school setting. If these true life barriers prevent parents from applying for the funds, then who will really benefit from these programs?

With parents given permission to cherry pick services, we believe that there may be a hardship for smaller organizations to keep their businesses afloat, therefore, giving a fiscal advantage to large, out-of-state and out-of-touch corporations.

Currently, the state of Colorado ranks 36th in spending towards funding K-12 schools and spends less than the national average. We, as a state, are moving to pay down the Budget Stabilization Factor (BS factor).

LCWC feels a better expenditure for this initiative would be to edify the system already in place, rather than create new startup initiatives that private, for profit companies/organizations will benefit from. Ignoring the budget reduction efforts of K-12 education, even while funding is short, doesn't really align with true support for public education.

We believe a more stable approach is to work on fixing the school finance act, continue paying down the BS factor, rally communities to support important education mill levies, and continue to find innovative contribution resources that come from a caring community.

That is how we are going to realize the goal of a fully funded Colorado K-12 education system. We can no longer be content with the bottom position within comparative state rankings.

While Initiative 119 sounded like a good idea on the surface, our examination into the guts of the proposal left us with waning elation. The Latino Coalition of Weld County cannot support this Initiative as it stands but commits to work with school districts and our community, to edify our established public education system.

— Latino Coalition of Weld County is a grassroots organization that works to foster leadership, representation and participation by a diverse community at all levels

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