



## “PRIORITIZE EDUCATION” - Initiative 63

**Issue:** Underfunding of schools has been a chronic problem for decades in Colorado, never more visibly than during the ongoing COVID-19 pandemic and resulting educator shortage. Colorado schools are currently funded at a level \$600 per pupil behind inflation since the Great Recession in 2008. Colorado teachers have [the least competitive wages in the nation](#) with additional [critical staffing shortages](#) of paraprofessionals, food service workers, bus drivers, and other staff who ensure our students have safe and healthy schools. Additionally, for the first time in its 117 year history, Children’s Hospital Colorado [declared a youth mental health state of emergency](#).

**Opportunity:** According to the [latest Legislative Council economic forecast](#), Colorado’s strong economic recovery is producing rapid growth in revenues (under current tax rates), amounting to an estimated \$5 billion above what the constitutional “TABOR” formula will allow the state to retain and spend over the next three years.

**Challenge:** Without action, Colorado’s severe school staffing shortage – and the resulting loss of instruction, individual attention and social-emotional supports for students – will only worsen. And, with federal COVID dollars ending in 2023-2024, the same time that Colorado will face a structural budget deficit (because of Colorado’s constitutional formulas), schools will fall off a funding cliff if we don’t find a sustainable revenue source now.

**Solution:** A ballot measure to expand an existing fiscal mechanism to remove approximately \$900 million from the TABOR surplus and dedicate those dollars to P-12 education. ***There would be no increase in tax rates and, because of the size of the surplus, taxpayers would still receive rebates.***

**Ballot Concept:** Divert an additional  $\frac{1}{3}$  of 1% of taxable income already collected under existing law to the State Education Fund (SEF) and remove it permanently from the TABOR surplus calculation. The SEF is currently funded annually using this mechanism.

- A diversion of .33% would be about **\$896 million**, meaning that \$1 billion in TABOR “surplus” would still be rebated.
- Additional funding would be directed towards “attracting, retaining, and compensating teachers and student support professionals.”

- Adding this as a significant and ongoing funding stream for P-12 education will help reduce pressure on the General Fund for other state funding priorities, such as higher ed, transportation, health care and housing.
- The ballot title would NOT be required to start with “SHALL TAXES BE INCREASED BY,” because there would be no increase in taxes.
- The measure is being explored and developed through an inclusive policymaking process that has already engaged potential Colorado and national funders, business leaders, and a diversity of education and social justice organizations on all sides of many polarized education issues.
- The measure is statutory – not constitutional – and so is not subject to the heightened “Raise the Bar” requirements: it needs only 50%+1 votes at the ballot to pass; if the measure is initiated, there is no requirement for signatures to be gathered in every Senate District; and to be referred by the legislature, only a simple majority in each house would be required.
- Local voters will be informed about how the dollars will be spent in their own district, in effect creating 178 local narratives.

## POLLING:

Survey of 800 statewide in mid-November by Tulchin Research

- **Six in 10 voters (60%) feel that funding for K-12 education in Colorado should be increased** and 65% of voters support the idea of dedicating additional revenue to the state education fund without raising taxes.
- The measure attracts majority support at the outset, with sample ballot language for a citizen initiative **(60% Yes to 30% No)**. Support also proves fairly resilient in a simulated campaign. After respondents heard arguments from both supporters and opponents, the vote for the citizen initiative shifts to 55% Yes to 32% No while the vote for the referral initiative shifts to 55%-34%.
- Titles tested did not include accountability language that would appear in the actual title.

**If you have any questions, would like to support this concept as a partner, or are interested in joining the *Great Schools, Thriving Communities* coalition as a member institution, please reach out to any of the following points of contact:**

- Cody Ostenson ([cody@greateducation.org](mailto:cody@greateducation.org))
- Ben Robinson ([ben@greateducation.org](mailto:ben@greateducation.org))
- Lisa Weil ([lisa@greateducation.org](mailto:lisa@greateducation.org))
- Tracie Rainey ([t.rainey@cosfp.org](mailto:t.rainey@cosfp.org))

