First Regular Session
Seventy-fifth General Assembly
STATE OF COLORADO

INTRODUCED

LLS NO. R25-1051.01 Jessica Chapman x4636 **SJR25-021**

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SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 25-021

CONCERNING A COMMITMENT TO PURSUING FULL AND FAIR FUNDING OF PUBLIC SCHOOLS.

WHEREAS, Public education is the bedrock of our democracy, fundamental to individual opportunity, the underpinning of thriving communities, and the key to Colorado's economic prosperity and future; and

WHEREAS, Wise and adequate investment in Colorado's schools is essential to maintaining and improving the competitiveness of Colorado and its students; and

WHEREAS, The funds invested in Colorado's public schools have a return on investment that has long been recognized among the nation's highest; and

WHEREAS, Increasing rates of high school graduation, industry certifications, and associates degrees demonstrate the effectiveness of Colorado's investment in public schools; and

WHEREAS, Research demonstrates that increased funding for schools results in long-term gains in graduation rates and lifetime wages, prevents crime, and lowers incarceration costs; and

WHEREAS, Educators and support staff in every school district and school across Colorado make invaluable contributions to their schools, districts, and communities by dedicating their time, talents, and out-of-pocket funds to their students, despite Colorado having the largest "teacher pay penalty" in the nation; and

WHEREAS, A study published in March 2022 in SAGE Open found that when public school teachers are paid more, students perform better, leading to improved academic outcomes; and

WHEREAS, Colorado is currently funding schools at a level that approximates the state's 1989 per-pupil spending adjusted for inflation, which does not account for the cost increases experienced by school districts for health care, energy use, and PERA contributions or for the additional demands on schools that have arisen in the past three decades for such developments as standards-based education, rapid advances in technology and career technical education, and behavioral health challenges related to COVID, trauma, and social media; and

WHEREAS, In 2023, the general assembly took concrete steps to investigate and address the need for additional school funding resources in light of changes made by the passage of Senate Bill 23-287, the School Finance Act, which created a School Finance Task Force to make recommendations for beneficial changes to the school finance formula and commissioned two "adequacy studies" to assess what resources and additional funding would be necessary to ensure that all Colorado students can reach the standards and requirements set by the state of Colorado; and

WHEREAS, The general assembly passed a supplemental appropriations bill in 2024, dedicating \$3 million to the adequacy studies to ensure that they are conducted to the highest standards of rigor, research, and data analysis -- of which, Colorado spent \$2 million; and

WHEREAS, In 2024, the School Finance Task Force issued a report to the general assembly with recommendations for the legislature to make changes to the school finance formula to improve the equity and adequacy of school funding -- some of which were incorporated in House Bill 24-1448 -- and suggested that the legislature "should annually revisit and update the base and need weights" and that "[u]pdates should reflect the results of the adequacy studies when they have been published"; and

WHEREAS, In January 2025, the legislature received the reports and recommendations of the two commissioned studies: "Equity and Adequacy of Colorado School Funding - A Cost-Modeling Approach" by the American Institute for Research (AIR) and "Colorado Input-Based Financial Adequacy Study Report," by Augenblick, Pailaich and Associates, Inc (APA); and

WHEREAS, Both studies found that Colorado's teachers' salaries are too low, and the tax system that supports schools is inequitable and inadequate; and

WHEREAS, The AIR study recommends that the Colorado legislature commit to set funding levels commensurate with Colorado's education goals, increase funding weights for at-risk students so more resources are based on student need, raise teacher pay and hire more teachers, reduce inequity in local taxes, and adjust salaries to account for regional differences in cost of living; and

WHEREAS, The APA study recommends that the state provide a funding base of $12,346 per student, that small districts should continue to receive extra funding, and that the state should provide funding to equalize mill levy override funding across districts; and

WHEREAS, According to the study by APA, adequate funding would be $3.5 billion higher than the current level, and $3.1 billion higher than the House Bill 24-1448 formula would be when fully implemented; and

WHEREAS, Were Colorado funding our schools fully and fairly as defined by the adequacy studies, every student would have the individual attention they need from teachers, counselors, health professionals, tutors, and support staff to succeed and thrive; every teacher would have a reasonable workload, professional development and coaching, and a salary that would allow them to live where they work;

and every community would enjoy the benefit of vibrant public schools, a high-quality workforce, and an engaged citizenry; and

WHEREAS, The sustainability and adequacy of public school funding in Colorado is currently threatened by Colorado's fiscal constraints, the depletion of the state education fund, and the potential of federal funding cuts to education, Medicaid, school nutrition, human services, and other critical programs; and

WHEREAS, The general assembly has both the opportunity and the responsibility to turn the adequacy study data into a multi-year, structured plan -- Colorado's Blueprint for Student Success -- to create a Colorado where every child has access to great teachers, individual attention, support services, appropriate technology, and a broad, high-quality education so they can thrive; and

WHEREAS, Failing to make progress towards the implementation of the adequacy study recommendations would result in a waste of the funds used to commission these high-quality studies, as well as break trust with the students who rely on adults to solve difficult problems that will fundamentally impact their lives; now, therefore,

Be It Resolved by the Senate of the Seventy-fifth General Assembly of the State of Colorado, the House of Representatives concurring herein:

That we, the members of the General Assembly:

(1) Reaffirm the critical importance of public education and the fair and full funding thereof; and

(2) Declare that it is the intent of the Colorado Senate to honor the $2 million investment in the adequacy studies made by the taxpayers of Colorado by taking concrete steps to gain an understanding of the findings and recommendations of the studies, choose which study's methodology and recommendations to follow, and develop a multi-year implementation plan, including revenue triggers, to phase in the recommendations.

Be It Further Resolved, That copies of this Joint Resolution be sent to Governor Jared Polis, Senate President James Coleman, Senate Majority Leader Robert Rodriguez, Senate Minority Leader Paul

Lundeen, House Speaker Julie McCluskie, House Majority Leader Monica Duran, and House Minority Leader Rose Pugliese.