

Colorado Commission on Higher Education 2021 DRAFT Action Plan

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Commission Role and Mission:

The Colorado Commission on Higher Education (the “Commission”) and the Colorado Department of Higher Education (the “Department”) work in unison as the only entities in the state with the sole responsibility for the vibrancy and health of Colorado’s overall higher education ecosystem. Although the Commission and the Department’s statutory powers vary from one another, with the Department owning broader authority over private occupational schools, they work collaboratively and with a shared mission. Among many other statutory responsibilities, the Commission is charged with creating and developing a master plan and statewide strategies to support Colorado’s institutions of higher education (“IHEs”) as they serve Colorado’s students, families, economy, and democracy. The Department is responsible for day-to-day execution of the master plan and other statutory duties, as well as staffing the Commission. The Commission and the Department’s existing masterplan, *Colorado Rises, Advancing Education and Talent Development*, stipulates four overarching goals: 1) increase credential completions, 2) erase the equity gap, 3) improve student success, and 4) invest in affordability and innovation. Addressing these goals strategically and thoughtfully will make college more affordable and accessible and will increase the “value proposition” of a degree from Colorado’s IHEs.

The Department and the Commission remain steadfast in their support of the master plan and recognize the opportunity, *and frankly - responsibility*, to help align Colorado’s IHEs, education advocates, business community, non-profits, and statewide policy makers to achieve these goals and to address the systemic challenges facing Colorado postsecondary ecosystem.

The Commission is resolute in our belief that the entirety of the Colorado’s higher education ecosystem is greater than the sum of its parts; and that Colorado is best positioned when we take such a lens. Today, more than ever, amidst challenging economic times, we must strategically work together. As such, the Commission will be bullish on initiatives and policies that incent collaboration, efficiency, and innovation.

Colorado’s Post-Secondary Challenges and Opportunities:

Colorado must invest in its own “*learners and talent*” if it wants to erase its equity gap, produce a highly competitive workforce prepared for the jobs of tomorrow and create a pathway to opportunity for all Coloradans. The state’s economic competitiveness is at stake. Experts believe more than 75 percent of Colorado’s jobs will require at least some measure of postsecondary education, and yet, only 57.6 percent of Colorado adults ages 24-35 have a degree or certificate from an IHE¹. As one of the most highly educated states in the nation, Colorado imports a substantial number of graduates rather than graduating its own Colorado residents. Until all Coloradans have access to affordable, high-quality instruction from pre-K through meaningful postsecondary credentials and degree attainments, our collective mission is not complete. As the COVID-19 pandemic ravages our Coloradan families, towns, and institutions, a focus on that mission is even more critical.

Colorado's Higher Education Economic Backdrop: There are currently multiple hard truths in Colorado's higher education funding landscape. Not only is Colorado funding its IHEs less overall when adjusted for inflation than it did in 2001, but Colorado's IHEs also receive substantially less total state funding than other states, placing a significant burden not only on our IHEs but also on Colorado students and families. In FY 2019, Colorado funded its IHEs 17.6% less than it did in 2001 when adjusted for inflation.ⁱⁱ According to a recent studyⁱⁱⁱ completed by Hanover Research, Colorado's IHEs are significantly underfunded by the State as compared to their institutional counterparts across the nation. When comparing Colorado institutions and their peers in *total unrestricted state and local appropriations*, Colorado IHEs receive 66% less statewide than their counterparts nationally, with both Fort Lewis College and the CU System at the widest discrepancy of -70% and Adams State with the lowest differential at -46%. According to SCHEF, Colorado IHEs received 61% of the US average in state appropriations per student, ranking the state 46th in the nation^{iv} as of 2019.

In order to make up for the absence of state funds, Colorado IHEs have had to compensate through tuition and fees. The Hanover study reports that Colorado IHE *net tuition and fee revenue* are collectively 18% higher statewide than their peer institutions. However, that includes Fort Lewis College and Metro State University (MSU) at a low of -29% and -41% respectively whereas the CU system notably stands at 34% above its peer institutions for *net tuition and fee revenue*. This large swing between Colorado institutions reflects a the market-driven "tuition ceiling" that naturally exists for each IHE at which point tuition/fee increases likely result in an ensuing decline in enrollment. Colorado's IHE have been delicately walking this balancing act, but clearly some IHEs have much greater flexibility to do so.

Additionally, Colorado's IHEs struggle under the added weight of ongoing debt financing for previously constructed academic buildings. Historically, the State covered capital construction projects but as the State's share of higher education dollars plummeted, so too did state money for capital construction projects. The Commission and General Assembly, shortly after the Great Recession, began requiring IHEs to provide a percent match for capital construction and IT projects to secure limited state funds. As a result, Colorado's IHEs now collectively carry nearly \$825 million in construction related debt^v, financed with revenue bonds and/or certificates of participation often backed by student fees and "hopeful" outside donations and/or projected enrollment increases. Overall declining enrollments and the added economic pressures of COVID-19 are crippling IHEs ability to manage their debt ratios without making more dramatic and draconian cuts. Already one Colorado IHE has been downgraded for their debt structure.

Bottomline, Colorado IHEs fare poorly when compared to their counterparts in total revenue received. Statewide, CO IHEs receive roughly 17% less total revenue than their peer institutions nationally, with MSU at a high of -52% and Colorado Mesa University at just -4%. Only Colorado School of Mines is competitive with their peer group nationally.

Financial Impact on Colorado Families: The brunt of this funding scenario has been felt by Colorado students and families. A generation ago, Colorado paid for nearly 70 percent of college costs while students and families paid just over 30 percent. Today, the reverse is true; students and families pay nearly 59% percent, down from a high in FY 2017/18 of 66%. Meanwhile, the state now shoulders only 41% of the cost, up from FY 2018/19 where the state covered only 34% of the cost.^{vi} Essentially, the state's decreasing share of revenue places a higher premium on international and out-of-state students (*for those IHEs that can attract them in first place*) who pay higher tuition. Non-resident student FTE across the CU System was 23.3% of its overall student enrollment in 2001 and is now 28.7% in 2019^{vii}. Some of Colorado's rural IHEs, however, have more difficulty attracting international and out-of-state students. Mesa University's non-resident population is roughly 14%^{viii} of overall enrollment, and UNC's non-resident enrollment is 8.4%^{ix} of its total undergraduate enrollment. **FIND Stat for school with lowest out- of-state enrollment and use here instead of prior sentence-also need to update endnotes.**

Meanwhile, the federal investment in higher education, mainly through federal student loans, has grown significantly. Between 2000 to 2012, revenue from federal funds grew by 32 percent while state revenue decreased 37 percent. "While these numbers don't include private loans, several studies find the cost of tuition goes up partly because of the virtually unlimited supply of both federal and private loans".^x Student loan debt in Colorado, for instance, has grown 176% since 2007, reaching \$26.4 billion and placing Colorado 36th in the nation^{xi}. "For the 2017-2018 fiscal year, 66.9 percent of bachelor's degree students attending Colorado's public institutions graduated with debt, an average of \$23,425. Of those earning an associate degree, 55 percent graduated with debt, with an average amount of \$13,261"^{xii}. Carrying debt in and of itself isn't bad nor does it imply that college is unaffordable for all. For some students their debt is incremental when compared to their future earning potential after completing their degree or certificate. Thankfully for Colorado's families and students, student debt has begun to decrease between fiscal year 2013-14 and 2018-19 and is below the national average for a bachelor's degree.

Thus, a convergence of several seemingly disparate trends has created an almost "perfect storm" within higher education nationally. IHE's increasing reliance on tuition and the steady increase in the overall college enrollment rate over the last few decades have inadvertently incentivized many IHEs to more aggressively compete for students and their federally financed student aid through expensive campus improvements like premium dorm rooms, fitness centers and labs, as well as other expensive student amenities. Further fueling tuition costs ironically and, again, greater reliance on loans.

Additional Cuts Due to COVID-19: Colorado’s IHEs have had to cut and realign their budgets to address the immediate economic losses caused by COVID-19 as they simultaneously prepare for the long-term effects of an economic downturn in the wake of COVID-19. This economic constriction will naturally force additional cost containment measures that might not have otherwise been explored or implemented by the IHEs. In some cases, these cuts may even be long overdue. Our concern, however, is these reactionary cuts and realignments do not always address the systemic challenges that existed prior to the onset of COVID and are not an actual solution to the long-term financial well-being of institutions. These types of cuts – often made with an eye towards short-term financial necessity – do not always follow long-term, strategic plans rooted in program-value, need, and viability. In other cases however, we recognize that the economic downturn has allowed some IHEs to move forward with tough decisions that might not have been politically expedient without the added economic justification caused by COVID-19. We encourage IHEs to continue the hard work both internally, and with stakeholders, to reassess their long-term strategic plans, academic offerings, and operations as they contain costs and make college more affordable for Colorado’s families and workforce.

Without an additional infusion of federal stimulus dollars, Colorado’s IHEs may have to make additional cuts in FY 2021-22 since the state continues to face budget challenges and is not projected to completely fill the ensuing financial gap. CARES Act dollars undoubtedly mitigated the impact for 2020, but the bill’s infusion of one-time dollars with the many federally mandated constraints attached to those dollars does not make up for years of inadequate state funding nor solve for future year deficits. Bottom line, the swing from an anticipated 7% increase to a reduction of 5% in the state allocation is a challenge for even the most well-funded institution. During previous recessions, as state appropriations for higher education were cut across the country, institutions reluctantly responded by increasing tuition for families - a “release valve” of sorts for the institutions. However today, given the already high price of tuition and forced-move to online learning, institutions have little room to increase tuition without likely seeing a significant drop in demand. These decreasing - *or even flat* - enrollment trends will no doubt exacerbate the financial challenges campuses were already facing.

COVID Widens Equity Gap: The pandemic appears to have exacerbated the equity gap nationally and in Colorado, impacting both the access and success of students. Early data suggests that fewer students of color and from lower socio-economic backgrounds are applying, enrolling, and retaining in postsecondary education since the onset of COVID-19.

First-time entering student enrollment is down statewide by 12%, with UNC experiencing the largest reduction at -25% and Adams State down significantly at -15%.

NEED additional diversity numbers and first-generation numbers here. Ask Ben and the Department to provide the most current data from the fall enrollment census which has not yet been shared with the Commission.

The “Existential Crisis” Facing Higher Education: It is not uncommon to hear the phrase “higher ed faces an existential crisis”. This is undoubtedly true after COVID-19’s dislocation of students and employees last spring as campuses faced an unprecedented shift to remote learning. However, while COVID-19 may have pushed higher education’s “existential crisis” to the forefront of conversations, this crisis already existed. The perceived value of a degree was already under assault, equity gaps persisted, and industry leaders questioned the job readiness skills of future employees coming out of IHEs nationally. As the cost of higher education exploded and students and families were forced to take on greater debt to pay for it, public perception of higher education soured, and many parents and students questioned the very value of a college degree.

During the last recession amidst state-budget cuts nationally, community colleges lacking critical financial resources, were poorly positioned to meet the rising demand of students returning to campus. Well-funded for-profit colleges, on the other hand, were well-positioned to capitalize. According to a recent *New York Times* article by David Deming, “unemployed job seekers turned to for-profit colleges, often with disastrous results.”^{xiii} Deming points out “history is repeating itself” as we again see online, for-profit training increase - a history that we know did not serve students and families well and left many with crippling debt that plagued a generation of students and workers and, for many, tainted the value-proposition of college in America. “In 2018, approximately 10 percent of student borrowers from the 2015 graduate cohort defaulted within three years of getting their degree and in Colorado, more than 11 percent are in default.”^{xiv} This cannot be the story for our students, our families, or our community colleges again.

Colorado’s student demographic profile is changing more rapidly than the campuses at which they attend can evolve, placing greater academic and social pressures on our IHEs. The “*face*” of the traditional college student is changing - students are older and more diverse. Colorado IHEs enroll more low-income, first-generation, and diverse students than in previous decades. Despite a commendable effort, Colorado continues to have some of the largest equity gaps for college attainment in the nation. Only 29% of Hispanics, Colorado’s fastest-growing population, and 39% percent of African Americans have a certificate or degree compared to 64% of Anglo Coloradans^{xv}. Simultaneously, a much-needed national conversation addressing systemic racial injustice ensues, and Colorado students are demanding, and rightly so, a more representative and inclusive environment at our postsecondary institutions. Ensuring we have safe, affordable, and quality options for all Coloradans is paramount. The challenge however, is that the “wrap around” student-supports proven most successful to help at-risk and first-generation students complete their college certificate or

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degree are often time and labor intensive, thereby increasing the cost to the institution to graduate these students. Although, one can also argue - in this era of fitness centers and premium dorms created to attract more “traditional” students - it doesn't *actually* cost more to educate at-risk students, it's just that nationally, our IHEs weren't designed to serve these students in the first place. Further, dramatic cost containment measures may adversely affect at-risk students to a greater degree than the general college population, potentially jeopardizing the return on investment of enrollment in post-secondary institutions if students fail to complete a degree or credential.

Keeping all students on track to graduation both addresses the equity gap and immediately increases the *value* of college enrollment for many families and for the Colorado economy. Students graduating higher education with insurmountable debt, or even worse - students withdrawing with massive debt and no degree - not to mention, those students dissuaded by the cost of higher education who choose not attend in the first place, have long-term financial implications for the students, families, and the communities in which they reside.

Need for Greater Workforce Alignment: Finally, the very future of work is also evolving faster than our institutions who are responsible to train the future workforce can adapt. The integration of new technologies into or economy, like artificial intelligence (AI) and automation, cyber communications, block-chain, nano-technology, and new agri-tech and biotech is transforming what the jobs in Colorado look like. The skills needed for jobs that will be open in the future are changing and more and more workers will be outpaced and displaced without additional training and education. States that prepare, upskill, and reskill employees for the workforce of tomorrow will be the states that attract and retain the industries driving our economic futures. And those industries need an entirely different relationship with higher education institutions. Higher education now, more than ever, and community colleges more specifically, must respond innovatively and with agility to provide the necessary up-skilling and re-skilling aligned to workforce needs and to bridge individuals to a four-year degree and/or a career.

Institutions and departments may need to adapt their business models as they see adult learners return to campus and demand more workforce training. We are hopeful that the ingenuity and nimbleness IHEs demonstrated in response to campus closures last spring as they transitioned to remote learning almost overnight will continue as IHEs respond to ongoing job displacement as a result of COVID-19 and to rapidly evolving local, regional, and global economic needs.

Other Needed Reforms: As institutions explore innovative ways to better serve students and meet workforce needs by offering programs outside of a traditional, credit-bearing degree programs and honoring skills attained outside of the classroom by creating more pathways for students, states may need to react in kind and evolve as well. Colorado state statute has been constructed over the last two decades with “*traditional*” higher education structures and approaches in mind. Statutes related to institutional role and mission and transfer pathways that were largely designed for institutions and faculty, not for students or industry partners, often conflict with innovative ideas. Colorado should also explore how student and academic affairs policies and codified role and mission statutes hinder progress. Additionally, as institutions and the state shift to serve different types of students, we should rethink the way student aid is prioritized and administered. Though this is an area that institutions have a significant amount of flexibility, there is little oversight in how aid is awarded. There is an opportunity for Colorado to encourage innovation, share best practices, and support scaling new approaches to how institutions use state and institutional financial aid resources to support learners.

Moving Forward: There are indeed multiple sad truths: state funding for higher education has decreased; tuition has increased for families; students are saddled with burgeoning loans; Colorado is not erasing our equity gap; and we need to do more to reskill and upskill our workforce. Rather than continuing to debate which truth is worse, we will be better served focusing on how to align our limited resources to help all Colorado students afford and complete their post-secondary education and how to help our IHEs emerge from the current *pandemic-recession*.

Recommendations on the 2021-2022 Budget Allocation:

Last year, the Commission supported a new formula developed through a negotiated process undertaken by the leadership of the IHEs themselves. HB 20-1366 ultimately established a new *performance-based* funding allocation model for higher education that contains three key steps. Steps one and three provide greater year-over-year flexibility by allocating funds based on criteria (yet to be fully developed) that are intended to consider institutional needs, base funding concerns, specific institutional projects, specific targeted populations and/or worthwhile innovative initiatives. Funding allocated via step one is base-building; whereas step three funding is not base building and can either be a one time or multi-year allocation. Step two funding is based upon performance in specified and weighted Master Plan values and metrics as outlined in the existing formula. The Commission is responsible to vote on the formula itself and to make recommendations on how and in what manner the formula should be used.^{xvi}

We welcome the request made by the Governor seeking the Commission's recommendations on how to approach funding this year given the dramatic impacts COVID-19 has had on our state budget overall and our IHEs specifically. Additionally, the request comes on the heels of our annual retreat at which we began to refocus and reprioritize our work for the coming year. To that end, we outline the Commission's financial recommendations and work plan below and invite the Governor and other policy makers to attend one of the Commission's monthly meetings to discuss further the opportunities and challenges facing our higher education ecosystem as a whole and how we as a state should respond accordingly.

Commission's Recommended Fiscal Principles and Criteria:

- **Use the Formula as Designed:** The existing performance based formula (as outlined in HB 20-1366) should be used regardless of whether the state faces economic cuts or has the opportunity to invest more in higher education.
- **Invest in Higher Education Long-Term:** The Commission is well aware that the state faces unprecedented budget challenges that will likely extend several budget cycles. Nonetheless, the State of Colorado must work to increase funding to Colorado's public institutions of higher education and should not view K-12 and higher education increases as a zero-sum game. Increases in both are needed and should not come at the expense of the other. Likewise, we believe fully funding K-12 has long term benefits for Colorado's higher education ecosystem as well.
- **Prioritize Investments with High Public Benefit but Low Salary Incentives for the Workforce:** The state should incent enrollment in majors and programs that are associated with overall economic growth and/or that have high social value, such as early child care and education, teaching, and healthcare, but whose graduates have low wages and face higher debt burdens upon graduating, despite the fact that they advance the state's public interest.
- **Equal is Not Equitable:** In the case of funding reduction scenarios, the Commission is opposed to across-the-board (same percentage) reductions in state funding for each institution.
- **Cost Containment Transparency:** Institutions are already responsible for reporting their progress toward master plan goals. As part of that reporting process, institutions should include an update on the *significant* measures they've taken to reduce costs and increase efficiencies overall, giving institutions a chance to share how they responded to their budget constraints as well as their response to COVID 19. This improved transparency will help the public understand Colorado institutions' commitment to serving and improving the value proposition for all students. It would also help the state share best-practice and identify opportunities to scale innovation. To be clear, this request is not intended to be a burdensome compliance exercise with cumbersome, detailed spreadsheets, but rather an opportunity to create greater transparency and broadly capture the extent of cuts and their impact on students.
- **Meaningful and Transparent Program Review & Prioritization:** The Commission/Department will ask institutions to share their approach to Program Review and Prioritization to ensure that they are maximizing their value to students, industry, and to the state. All institutions should be undertaking comprehensive review processes to ensure they are using all their resources efficiently by reducing duplication, minimizing administrative overhead, and offering the most high impact programs to students. Again, this provides an opportunity for institutions of higher education to communicate to the state and to students the work that they are doing to maintain *value* for all students and for Colorado. We acknowledge that an over emphasis on program review, however, may inadvertently place too great a focus on faculty and simply tinkers around the edges without addressing more expensive arenas like administration and athletics. Nonetheless, program review is still something strong institutions do. Sharing their philosophy and approach to program review will also help the state share best-practice and identify opportunities for IHEs to learn from one another.
- **Additional Financial Support and Intervention Trigger:** Institutions that experience downward trends or a negative downgrade in any two of the following indicators should undergo a mandatory comprehensive budget analysis to fully assess the state of their finances, explore alternative program alignment, and identify additional cost savings and revenue opportunities. This review should be completed by an independent financial review team (IFRT) as outlined below.

Possible Financial Indicators:

- Composite Financial Index (CFI) Rating
- Bond rating downgrade or negative watch
- IHE's ability to financially meet its debt obligations
- Sustained declining enrollment trends

As outlined above, all Colorado's IHE face real financial challenges. However, a few IHEs have faced persistent economic challenges that have historically required additional funds be allocated through "guardrails" in the previous state funding formula. Although we believe the formula should be used to increase and/or divert needed funds to IHEs struggling financially, we no longer believe it is feasible or responsible to simply "plug these budget holes" through "guardrails" or "steps" without transparently discussing and addressing the underlying financial and/or operational challenges.

Several rural IHEs face additional challenges due to the region in which they are located that unfortunately limits their opportunities for growth and fiscal sustainability. Their existence is crucial to their community's overall economic and community health by providing critical jobs and meaningful healthcare/education pipelines to local hospitals and K-12 school systems, in addition to serving a student population that might not otherwise enroll at other state IHEs. In these cases, coming to terms with the actual cost to maintain an appropriately "sized" campus that meets the needs of the region and transparently factoring that into future funding allocations would be a worthwhile step for the state and our higher education ecosystem.

Simultaneously, we do not want to penalize IHEs that are making prudent decisions based on current conditions and who, notwithstanding COVID-19's unexpected effects, are meeting and exceeding Master plan goals and metrics as well maintaining a stable fiscal portfolio. Somehow we also need to recognize success and incent continued excellence within the formula as well.

Independent Financial Review Team (IFRT) - Triggered by Budget Indicators:

As a result of meeting the above-mentioned financial thresholds, the state would require qualifying IHE's to undergo a third-party advisory review that would fully analyze the institution's financial wellbeing and its short and long-term economic viability. The IFRT in collaboration with the institution's leadership would determine the appropriate funding levels necessary to maintain the campus and to serve its students and community/region appropriately. Coming to a shared understanding of the facts/costs and recognizing the "public good" the institution plays in the broader community economically are important steps to better understanding how Colorado allocates its higher education budget appropriately and transparently.

The IFRT's recommendations would be shared with the IHE, its governing board, the Governor's Office, and the Commission/Department and would consider potential financial, operational, and business model changes that would protect the long-term sustainability of the IHE/campus and would increase access, affordability, and value for the institution's current and future students. The IFRTs recommendations would be non-binding. However, in order for an IHE to secure additional state funding above and beyond any allocations available to all other IHEs through the existing model, the IHE would need to enter into a negotiated performance contract with the Commission/Department as outlined below. Establishing an independent and clear shared understanding of the facts through the IFRT process is not intended to be punitive.

The review would be conducted by a mutually agreed upon team (3 – 4 people) of higher education and/ or financial experts who would work closely with the IHE's administrative team and would have access to all previous financial audits and any necessary financial documents. The IFRT would work in partnership with the institution to determine whether different approaches to financial viability are realistic and feasible. The IFRT would likely be composed of one paid consultant working in concert with 2 - 3 additional civic/business volunteer team members who collectively possess expertise in higher education instructional operations, higher education funding, and finance/debt service, and who also possess an appreciation for an IHE's role and broader economic standing in its regional context. The Commission is hopeful foundation financial support would be available to fund this process and limit its financial impact on the State's budget. It is beneficial that all parties agree to the makeup of the IFRT as trust and transparency are critical to the success of the process, as the process is not intended to be punitive.

Performance Contract Agreement:

Given the economic role IHEs play in their communities, it is undesirable and untenable to allow campuses to close. However, in some circumstances, it may not be possible to run a viable robust institution based on the existing funding formula allocation. If the IFRT determines this to be the case for an IHE who has undergone the review process, the Commission recommends the state

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implement a performance contract in order for the IHE to access supplemental dollars applied through Step 1 and/or Step 3 of the existing statewide budget formula, based on whether the funding was base-building or not.

In exchange for this additional support, IHEs falling in this category could only secure the additional funding based on the implementation of specific performance measures as outlined in the negotiated performance contract. In such cases, institutions may be required through the negotiated performance contract to adopt some or all of the recommendations put forth by the independent task force and possibly additional measures as negotiated by the parties. The contract would be negotiated by the Department (*or their designee*) and the IHE and formalized by the Commission and the IHE's Governing Board.

This effort could be addressed in the 2021 legislative session if statutory language is needed.

We believe this effort is valuable not just to the IHE itself, but also 1) protects the long-term viability of the surrounding community as our IHEs are often the driving economic force in the communities in which they are located and 2) strengthens Colorado's overall higher education ecosystem as we work to ensure our already limited dollars are used for the greatest statewide impact

Voluntary Financial & Operational Review Service:

The state should also make available at no cost to other interested IHEs this third-party financial advisory service (a modified IFRT process as described above) to support the IHEs' senior leadership teams to develop non-binding and purely confidential financial recommendations. This program would be an opt-in program by the institutions themselves and would not entail any additional oversight or performance management compliance measures. IHEs would be prioritized by need and associated costs would be covered by the state. If however, the IHE wanted to pursue additional dollars, they would be bound by a new negotiated performance contract and any additional dollars secured would be applied to either Step 1 or Step 3 as negotiated.

Commission Priorities and Action Plan:

The Commission plans to focus our time and attention on the following efforts to support and strengthen the overall capacity of Colorado's higher education ecosystem as we strive to meet the needs of *all* students and the workforce of tomorrow. These priorities aim to foster innovation and partnership, focus on student-centered teaching, learning, and academic supports, and shift to outcome-focused benchmarks.

1. Actively Work to Erase the Equity Gap:

For Colorado to sustain and enhance its cultural and economic strength, it must acknowledge its changing demographics, embrace its rich diversity, and strengthen its resolve to serve all Coloradans. The Commission will continue to advocate for initiatives that promote the elimination of equity gaps, like the Colorado Opportunity Scholarship Initiative (COSI) and the innovative pay-for-success pilot. It will also advocate for initiatives that create an environment for all Coloradans to thrive within postsecondary environments, like the Equity Champions Coalition and initiatives prioritizing mental and emotional health of students on our campuses. We are hopeful and look forward to IHEs using the new Innovation Policy process to expedite change and measurable results (*see 6 below*). The Commission supports the Department's focus on equity and their request for institutional Equity Action Plans at all our public IHEs and continued implementation of the goals established in SB 17-297. Lastly, the Commission will endeavor to hear authentic student "voice" to better understand the unique challenges facing students on campus.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Ongoing. The Commission seeks a summary of IHE Equity Action Plans and their benchmarks for success by March 2021. Moving forward, the Commission will dedicate a portion of its monthly meetings to focus on equity-related topics, many of which were exacerbated by COVID-19. Such topics will include enrollment and retention trends, technology access, remote academic instruction, and virtual learning, among others. Finally, and, in partnership with the Department, we will ensure we regularly host diverse students from across the state at our meetings to share their perspectives on how the state and institutions can better serve the needs of all students.

2. Convene a Future of Work Talent Taskforce:

Work as we know it is changing. Given the state's robust and growing technology industries and the state's investment in the creation of the Future of Work department through the Department of Labor and Employment, Colorado has a unique opportunity to emerge as a national leader in the future of work talent conversation.

The Commission recommends convening a joint task force of higher education leadership, K-12 CTE leadership, Future of Work department leadership, industry leaders in AI/cybertechnology, and national experts to explore how to build and support a robust pipeline that "home grows" the state's technology talent pool and attracts national and international PhDs and other high level talent to our research institutions. Driven by the close collaboration between IHEs, subject matter experts, and the employers looking to hire a highly skilled workforce, new state, national, and industry standards for credentials and certificates in growth industries need to be developed with an eye to the soft and hard skills necessary to enter, grow, and succeed on career paths in innovative industries such as AI, cyber, biotech nanotech, hemp, and CBD. Our IHEs are uniquely positioned to develop, adapt, and award meaningful skill certifications and programs. With a lens toward lifelong learning, IHEs are positioned to offer opportunities for upskilling and new skill acquisition to students and even returning alumni. We also recommend exploring the creation of a pipeline fund that helps universities attract diverse talent to make Colorado more competitive and to more rapidly develop and deploy AI degree programs and to scale AI enterprises as Colorado competes to address the future of work.

It is also crucial that this body of work attempt to meet the diverse regional economic needs of our state. Too often Colorado is overly reliant on an innovation corridor extending north to south along I-25. We believe the innovation corridor should also extend west and east to tie in manufacturing expertise on the west slope and the innovative agri-tech industries across Colorado's farming and ranching communities.

A multidimensional approach that pulls together industry leaders from across CO with key policy makers is essential to success of initiative. The Commission supports the Department's joint effort with the Department of Labor and Employment and the Colorado Workforce Development Council and seeks to leverage that effort to support this opportunity

Status & Recommended Timeline: Ideally the Task Force would convene no later than the first quarter of 2021 and its recommendations completed by no later than Q3.

3. Double Down on Stacked and Unbundled Credentials, Work-based Learning, and Prior Learning Assessment:

The Commission and Department will continue to champion initiatives that align education to the needs of the workforce. Such initiatives include apprenticeships, competency based learning, certifications, internships, work-based learning embedded into degree programs, and innovative industry partnerships that enable students to earn while they learn. The Colorado Industry Recognized Apprenticeship Programs (IRAPS), which identifies quality standards for industry to design apprenticeships, advocacy for paid internships championed by student leaders, like Young Invincibles, and the recently passed “*College Credit for Work-Related Experience*” (CRS 23-5-145.5 (HB 20-1002), which will ensure that all students can earn college credit for learning that happens outside of the traditional classroom, are examples of the type of innovative initiatives that save students time and money and align education to the economic needs of the state.

As automation looms and Coloradans struggle with underemployment and unemployment during the pandemic, the need for new skills has never been more urgent. While the future of work can present opportunities for the state, we must recognize that the changing workforce is expected to disproportionately impact those without postsecondary credentials. We must ensure no one is left behind and that all Coloradans are prepared for the new economy. Certificates and short-term credentials of value are a critical component of the postsecondary ecosystem, providing an affordable, efficient, and quality pathway for Coloradans to upskill, reskill, and earn a better job. Such credentials can still provide pathways towards a four-year degree; **it does not need to be “either, or”, but rather “yes, and”**. Community colleges can and should lead the way in providing agile and responsive opportunities for students with strong coordination and alignment with other higher education institutions. Again, we stress the importance of meeting Colorado’s regional and diverse economic needs.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Ongoing; Commission will ask to review Department’s action plan and benchmarks for success by January 2021. We believe it is worth exploring if apprenticeship models can extend to 4-year colleges so that clinical practice professions that need field work for certification and licensure can be supported as well.

4. Support Independent Advocacy Initiative for Higher Education in Colorado:

The Commission supports the creation of an independent advocacy group in support of Colorado’s higher education ecosystem that drives the following three equally essential initiatives:

- ❖ Focuses on the intersection of postsecondary education, workforce development, K-12, and industry to develop pathways and pipelines to the workforce;
- ❖ Builds the capacity of policy makers, higher education allies, and business/civic leaders to identify best practice in higher education and advocate on behalf of higher education in Colorado; and
- ❖ Effectively amplifies the work and successes of Colorado’s systems of higher education.

This autonomous effort would advocate broadly for greater investment in higher education and to advance and scale necessary innovations and initiatives to meet the emerging talent needs of the state through cross-sector and public-private collaboration and funding. Colorado has the opportunity to lead the nation in such an effort, likely attracting the support of both local and national funders.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Although this effort does not require formal action by the Commission nor Department, we do affirm the need for and value of this independent effort on behalf of Colorado Higher Education and look forward to partnering with it once established. Conveners are already in conversations to successfully launch this effort and ultimately establish separate, independent oversight outside the Department.

5. Support the Development of Independent Trustee Network:

The Commission supports the development of The Trustee Network, an independently formed entity of Trustees in support of Higher Education. The Commission encourages the Department to embrace this effort and to work in partnership where and when appropriate, namely around Trustee training. The actual scope of the Trustee Network will be broader than the activities on which the Commission/Department partner.

The Trustee Network and the Department will work collaboratively to support trustees in their responsibilities as members of IHE governing boards:

- ❖ Convene in partnership with The Network, the annual trustee training for Trustees as required by state statute.
- ❖ Host regular high-level briefings/convenings with national subject matter experts to highlight best practices and innovations nationally that help governing board members serve their institutions more effectively;
- ❖ Develop a new-trustee training manual that helps onboard new Trustees/Commissioners and quickly immerses them in the responsibilities of serving on a governing board and develops their oversight capacity and understanding of higher education in general and fiduciary challenges and responsibilities specifically.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Although this effort does not require formal action by the Commission nor Department, we do affirm the need for and value of this independent effort on behalf of Colorado higher education and look forward to partnering in the future. Individual Commission members are working to establish this enterprise.

The Trustee Network launched in November 2020 with a 13-member Executive Committee with a member from each of Colorado's IHEs. They convened November 11th with the adoption of goals, a draft workplan, and the formation of three working groups to guide its work. The training manual target completion is no later than December 2021.

6. Emphasize “Outcome” over “Compliance” & Incent Innovation:

Where appropriate, the Commission would like to shift policy initiatives from prescribing “how” IHEs must function to more clearly articulating desired outcomes that IHEs would subsequently be held accountable to achieve and/or exceed. The Commission desires that the Department and Commission adopt this philosophy and work to infuse it throughout our body of work. We applaud the Department's existing effort to create an outcome focused process for authorization and reauthorization of educator preparation programs.

To expedite and incent innovative practices overall, the Commission/Department will explore the following initiatives and to develop implementation plans:

- a) Implement the newly proposed Innovation Policy that allows IHEs a fast-tracked pathway to catalyze best practice and inform long-term CCHE policy changes. The Commission encourages IHEs to explore how this new policy may drive innovation to better meet the needs of students as IHEs address quality, access, equity, and affordability.
- b) Using the Return on Investment Report and other available data points, the Commission seeks to work in partnership with the Department to develop a “dashboard” in collaboration with IHEs that guide our work, benchmark success, and shape our conversations moving forward. See priority fourteen below to place this body of work into a broader context of the master plan and the next phase of work on it.

Status & Recommended Timeline: A) In process. The Commission passed the Innovation Policy in October 2020 and is collaborating with CDHE to implement the policy at the outset of 2021 B) This is a longer term initiative that will take close collaboration with IHEs. We believe it is the next phase of the “master plan process” and is key to Colorado's long-term success. Ideally the development of this would be complete by July of 2021.

7. Overhaul the Capital and IT Project Review Process:

The Commission's Finance and Audit Committee is revising the capital and IT projects process. The process will continue to assure that IHEs are aligning their work to the Master Plan and will explore how to incent and recognize cost containment efforts of the IHEs. The committee is exploring how best to score/weight IHE matching funds so as not to disproportionately favor larger, more well-financed institutions and how not to unintentionally incent institutions to over-commit their investment or fundraising potential in order to meet their match/share of a project. The Commission also recognizes the distinct role that rural institutions play in educating Coloradans and will endeavor to create a process that more fairly recognizes their context and financial constraints. The working group will seek input and feedback from IHE staff as they work to redesign the entire process and rubric.

Status & Recommended Timeline: The Financial Affairs Committee is already seeking feedback from key stakeholders on the recommended changes to the rubric and process. The new rubric will be complete for Q1 of 2021.

8. Collaborate Directly with IHE Leadership:

The Commission recommends it meet regularly (at least semi-annually) with the Presidents of the Institutions of Higher Education to hear firsthand the Presidents' primary objectives and challenges and to better align the Commission and Department staff to support and bolster the entire ecosystem. Further, the Commission hopes to challenge and inspire IHEs, the Department, and the Commission to work collectively and collaboratively in the best interest of Colorado's students and families and for the health and vibrancy of Colorado's higher education ecosystem.

Together, uniform performance indicators (dashboard) will be identified and reviewed that focus on access, completion rates, first generation and at-risk student supports, statewide articulation and transfer agreements that reduce time to degree, as well as affordability and innovation.

The Executive Director and staff would coordinate the logistics for such meetings. These meetings will provide opportunities for robust dialogue to share best practice, showcase exciting initiatives, identify critical needs, and to review agreed upon data indicators (dashboard).

Status & Recommended Timeline: The first convening should ideally happen no later than Q1 of 2021 and with the use of remote technology can be done efficiently and effectively. Developing the performance indicators is a lengthier process that would be informed by 6a above.

9. Develop Step 1 & 3 of the Funding Formula:

The Commission/Department will convene a work group to recommend the appropriate process, framework and timeline for determining and applying criteria for Steps 1 and 3 of the existing budget allocation formula in future budget cycles. The work group will include 1 – 2 representative designees from each of the following stakeholder groups/organizations: the CFO working group; IHE Presidents; the Governor’s Office; State Legislature; CDHE; and the Commission itself. The work group would be staffed by the Department.

Status & Recommended Timeline: The recommendations should be complete by February 2021.

10. Partner with K-12 to Accelerate Time to Completion:

We encourage expansion of meaningful opportunities for corequisite developmental education, prior-learning assessment, concurrent enrollment, AP & IB, and guaranteed transfer pathways in an effort to accelerate a student’s time to complete a credential or degree. The Commission applauds the Department’s work to date and encourages them to broaden these programs to help increase “value” for students. Higher education can do its job best when K-12 has been able to succeed in its charge. Students who come to higher education well prepared are more likely to complete their degrees, do so faster, and therefore, more cost-effectively.

The Commission, in collaboration with our K-12 counterparts, would like to explore opportunities to advance competency based learning and how to move from funding models built around seat-time and the Carnegie unit to competency-based models that allow schools to meet the needs of individual learners by creating greater flexibility for learners to progress at their own learning pace. We recognize that until IHEs embrace competency based learning and new funding models, elementary and secondary schools and their parents will be fearful of changes that might inhibit students’ transcript from being “recognized” by IHEs when applying to colleges.

Status & Recommended Timeline: The Commission would like to explore opportunities to further this conversation either using existing committee structures and guest speakers or by the formation of a small work group to advance ideas related to this topic. We look forward to hearing staff recommendations on how best to proceed and to collaborate with our K-12 counterparts and stakeholders.

11. Better Prepare Colorado’s Education Workforce:

Preparing excellent teachers is how Colorado’s IHEs invest in K-12’s effort to ensure that Colorado students are ready for the rigor of post-secondary education and ultimately attain a degree and/or certificate. Decades of research has shown that the number one factor in student performance is the classroom teacher. Teachers are the single most important determinant of student achievement. High quality Educator Preparation Programs (EPP) and the teachers they produce are the link. 2017 was the first year the majority of Colorado’s k-12 teacher-hires were from out-of-state. Just like we are not “graduating” our own college graduates at the same rate we import them - so too is now true with teachers. Already Colorado faces a 3000 plus teacher shortage statewide, which says nothing about addressing the lack of diversity of our teacher workforce overall. Colorado clearly needs to do more to attract, retain, and graduate diverse students from our EPPs.

As Colorado K-12 blends traditional instruction with competency based pathways and real-world career opportunities—as well as relying more heavily on new methods for academic delivery—CO IHEs responsible for teacher training programs must evolve in kind. Adopting competency based education initiatives will require significant changes to teacher pre-service preparation, licensure, professional development, and evaluation to better prepare teachers for the classrooms of tomorrow. Likewise, educator candidates’ own instruction should also be personalized and meaningful to each individual, allowing candidates to focus in growth areas and advance quickly in areas they have already mastered. Further, candidates should be able to demonstrate through *multiple* methods that they possess the knowledge and skills necessary for advancement (including licensure).

Over the past 20 years, IHEs have increased emphasis on clinical preparation which has been critical to better preparation programs and better teacher candidates. However, such experiences can create significant barriers to program completion due to the financial burden they place on candidates. More meaningful and extensive clinical experiences have created a need for earn-while-you-learn

opportunities available to other professions for which paid clinical experiences or apprenticeships are available. Therefore, the Department is committed to working with EPPs and their LEA partners to find creative ways to ensure that candidates are paid for their time in the classroom. For example, WOIA dollars and work study can be more efficiently utilized to ensure that candidates receive compensation during their clinical experiences.

Finally, EPPs should be evaluated based on program and completer outcomes not on “input” compliance.

Status & Recommended Timeline: The Commission recommends the Department create a work group that includes a broad array of key stakeholders and 1 -2 Commissioners to explore recommendations on how teacher-candidates can receive funding for their clinical experiences and to reduce the overall cost and time of pursuing a teaching certificate. To be completed by January 2022.

12. Expand OER and Governor’s Z-Degree Challenge:

The Commission supports the Department’s ongoing effort to build capacity for wide-scale implementation of open educational resources (OER). Since 2018, the proliferation of OER during this time of online learning was accentuated, proving an invaluable strategy for providing more affordable, high-quality, accessible, and equitable learning materials as well as approaches to instruction. As of the 2019-2020 academic year, the state’s \$550,000 investment resulted in approximately \$3.4 million in cost-savings to students. And the results go beyond financial savings to position Colorado as a national OER leader in this time of remote learning - much of which will continue past the end of the COVID-19 pandemic.

- There are now more than 100 unique courses developed with OER materials.
- OER materials are available for over 40% of Concurrent Enrollment GT course enrollments.
- Nearly 24,000 Coloradans are enrolled in courses with OER materials.

Status & Recommended Timeline: The Commission supports the Governor’s budget request to reinstate the funding to support a FTE to oversee the State’s OER program to further the investment already spent on this project.

13. Support and Help Coordinate Federal Lobbying When Appropriate:

When appropriate, the Department/Commission should help coordinate and lead lobbying efforts among the various IHEs in an effort to bolster the entire ecosystem and speak with a unified and collective voice.

Although another COVID-19 recovery tranche is not anticipated in advance of the new year, it is likely that another federal recovery package will be developed and negotiated following the Inauguration. It is vital that higher education remains a focal point for those dollars and that we achieve the needed flexibility and reduce unnecessary prerequisites. Colorado Concern’s recent report, *Together We Build*, advocates for “a targeted relief package of \$500 million to defease roughly half of the existing debt on academic facilities would provide immediate cash flow relief for every governing board in the State of Colorado, estimating the annual savings at almost \$21 million per year for Colorado’s governing boards collectively”^{xvii}. Colorado needs to be on the forefront advocating for infrastructure dollars in additional other COVID-19 related stimulus funds.

The Commission and Department should help lead a strategic lobbying effort. For instance, rather than simply sending additional letters co-signed by the Presidents and the Department, we should also proactively seek broader community support from organizations like Club 20, Action 22, Progressive 15, Colorado Concern, Regional Chambers of Commerce, etc. This effort would rely on Commission support, institutions’ lobbying teams, and be staffed by Department legislative staff. The Commission and Executive Director of the Department should send this local statewide letter of support to our colleagues in other states and ask them to initiate the same process in their own states. Ideally, we should also recruit, at minimum, our mountain west region to co-sign an additional letter of support from their own Executive Directors and Commissions for Higher Education, or equivalent entity in their state, supporting a more robust federal package for higher education.

Additionally, we should use similar tactics to garner more support across Colorado and the Rocky Mountain region in support of FAFSA reform at the federal level. There are multiple bills to dramatically streamline the FAFSA process to aid today’s diverse college-going population that if passed would allow Colorado students and school districts to recapture tens of millions in grants, work study, and scholarship dollars historically left on the table. The Department/Commission and the Governor should rally support for these initiatives.

Finally, the two federal laws governing the preparation, development, and evaluation of the nation’s education workforce – the Higher Education Act (HEA) and the Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) – expired in 2013 and 2006 respectively and will likely be addressed after the election. We need to keep a watchful on their movement and advocate strategically and effectively.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Ongoing - the Department and Commission should continue to work closely with IHEs to identify opportunities for this type of approach. Although the example illustrated above would require immediate action.

14. Actively Support Initiatives to Reform TABOR:

At its September 3, 2020, meeting, the Commission voted unanimously to support the repeal of the Gallagher Amendment in the November election, recognizing that the repeal would benefit higher education. We should also commit to being active participants in future TABOR reform efforts to protect and advocate for Colorado's IHEs.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Ongoing; the Commission recently passed a resolution to support the repeal of the Gallagher amendment.

15. Affirm Existing Master Plan & Develop Benchmarks for Success:

Written in 2012 and modified in 2017, Colorado's existing master plan is due to be rewritten by statutory obligation in 2021. The Commission believes continuity is essential for our overall success and that the existing 4 goals are still relevant for Colorado's long-term success. Therefore, the Commission recommends the Master Plan be updated to highlight new data points, however, we do not believe we should change its overarching goals or rewrite the entire document. Instead, the Commission recommends the Department/Commission work collaboratively with IHEs to develop a dashboard to more transparently track and benchmark success and signal areas for further intervention as outlined in 6a above. The time and energy spent on this process we believe will be more fruitful than spending time developing new overarching goals. Additionally, the Commission and the Department will prepare and discuss implementation strategies annually as we work towards meeting the four goals as outlined in *Colorado Rises - Advancing Education and Talent Development* which we believe still guides our mission and purpose.

Status & Recommended Timeline: Ongoing. The benchmarks for success should be finalized by January 2022.

16. Increase Effectiveness of the Commission & Efficiency of Meetings:

Commissioners seek to make our work more effective and more efficient. Beginning in January of 2021, we hope to better align Commission meeting agendas to the priorities highlighted in this workplan. We will more aptly use our work sessions and committee structure/meetings to review nuances and details of pending policy changes in an effort to streamline formal commission meetings and move items to consent agenda when/where appropriate.

We plan to work with the Chief of Staff and the Department's senior leadership to ensure meeting materials are effectively and efficiently prepared, shared, and discussed. Commissioners request receipt of meeting materials with ample time to review them, and as such, commit they will spend the adequate time in advance of meetings to appropriately read and review materials in advance – to allow sufficient time to actually discuss content and determine appropriate next steps vs. simply reviewing information verbally that has already been provided in written format. We also encourage the Department when appropriate to explore the concept of a “flipped classroom” in which longer presentations that require mostly direct “instruction” can be conducted by pre-recorded video and shared for Commissioners and other stakeholders to watch on their own time in advance of an actual “discussion” at meetings.

Finally, we will draft and implement an annual self-evaluation of our own work and outcomes. A subset of commissioners will volunteer to draft the evaluation, with input from the Department, to be completed in January of each year. We believe strong, well-functioning boards take time annually to evaluate and reflect on how they conduct their business on behalf of Colorado's taxpayers.

Conclusion and Next Steps:

This document is meant to serve as a conceptual plan for the work ahead for the Commission and Department. It is still in draft form as we need to continue to work in collaboration with the Department and with the many stakeholders across Colorado's higher education ecosystem. After stakeholder conversations and input, the Commission will use this document to drive our agendas and the work in the months and year ahead. We will update this plan quarterly or annually as needed.

The Commission feels strongly that the Commission and Department must work in unison to achieve the goals of the Master Plan and to collaboratively support Colorado's higher education ecosystem. The Commission will work with staff to make sure our monthly agendas and committee work reflect these priorities and allow for rich and robust discussion as we strive to accomplish these priorities.

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Finally, as we push to be more responsive to regional economic needs and workforce development, we cannot forget that our IHEs also serve a broader role in our communities and democracy as they inspire tomorrow's critical thinkers, inventors, artists, and writers. Although the pendulum does need to swing far, we need to be mindful of unintended consequences and maintain our nation's deep commitment to the pursuit of intellectual wellbeing.

The Commission invites Colorado's IHEs, industry leaders, and students themselves to challenge the status quo and demand more from the Commission and Department as we attempt to be more responsive, nimble, and intentional with the work ahead. We welcome your input, ideas, and innovations as we all work to support Colorado's students, communities, and democracy.

As the Governor stated in his Executive Order D 2020 175 directing the state action on Equity, Diversity, and Inclusion for all of Colorado, "We do not build walls of exclusion in Colorado - we build ladders of opportunity.

ⁱ Colorado Rises CCHE Masterplan, pg 7.

ⁱⁱ University of Colorado Website: <https://www.cu.edu/funding-higher-education-colorado> tab 5.

ⁱⁱⁱ MEMORANDUM Dr. Angie Paccione, Executive Director, November 10, 2020 RE: Hanover Resource Analysis Project

^{iv} SHEF, 2020.

^v *Together We Build* by Colorado Concern, Fall 2020, pg 36.

^{vi} University of Colorado Website: <https://www.cu.edu/funding-higher-education-colorado> tab 16.

^{vii} University of Colorado Website: <https://www.cu.edu/funding-higher-education-colorado> tab 13.

^{viii} Mesa website. . .

^{ix} UNC website

^x Student Debt 101 by Dorsa Djalizadeh. Bell Policy Center, February 2019 page 2

^{xi} Student Debt 101 by Dorsa Djalizadeh. Bell Policy Center, February 2019 page 1

^{xii} Student Debt 101 by Dorsa Djalizadeh. Bell Policy Center, February 2019 page 2

^{xiii} New York Times, 9.17.2020: *Community Colleges Can Be Engines of Economic Recovery* by David Deming

^{xiv} Student Debt 101 by Dorsa Djalizadeh. Bell Policy Center, February 2019 page 5

^{xv} Colorado Rises CCHE Masterplan, pg 7.

^{xvi} **Statutory Authority** (23-18-303.5(2); 23-18-303.5(3); 23-18-303.5 (4); and 23-18-303.5(4)(c)(l)) (23-18-307 (3) and 23-18-306.

^{xvii} *Together We Build* by Colorado Concern, Fall 2020, pg 27.