



COLORADO
Department of Education
Commissioner of Education

201 East Colfax Avenue
Denver, CO 80203-1799

Feb. 18, 2022

Dear Superintendents and BOCES Directors,

Happy Friday to you all! I hope that you are doing well given all that you have on your plate. I have been hearing so much about all you are going through and I'm seeing all the tremendous efforts you are making to keep the doors open and staff supported. Thank you.

Given everything I have been hearing about lately—from the CASE conference, my rural council, the rural alliance, and individual feedback, I wanted to connect with you on a personal level today, as personal as email can be, and let you all know what I am hearing. I am hearing frustration and exhaustion over too many grants, data collections, CDE turnover, and not enough understanding about what you are going through right now.

While I can't fix it all—please know I'm working on what I can. These days, it can be easy to lose track of others' perspectives and to extend grace to each other. Please know that CDE staff are working really hard to support you and get you what you need in the midst of all these challenges. Despite our best intentions, we know that we are not getting it all perfect right now. We are working to adjust and fix issues when we know about them and I continue to ask for your help in bringing challenges to my attention.

Here are some thoughts on each of these pain points...

Data Collection. I have heard a lot about the READ Act data collection and Grad Guidelines/"higher bar" policy and collection. I am taking that additional feedback and thinking about how to balance policy goals with the reality of the workloads this year. I'm not sure where/if we will be able to change them but I am exploring options.

Staff Turnover. I know that CDE Staff turnover brings challenges to you as well-- with lack of understanding or the learning curve that new employees have. I can see how that is very frustrating when you are already tired and at your wit's end. I can tell you that we are working hard to bring people on, teach them about our support mentality and get folks up-to-speed as quickly as possible. We are certainly struggling with some of the same staff shortages you are. Again, if you have specific challenges that are coming up for you, please let me know so we can make sure to coach our new staff.

Phone Calls. We are working on making sure that all staff are easily accessible by phone (at least when they are not in meetings). Many CDE staff members have historically not had cell phones. We have been very clear with staff about the need to be able to answer calls and check voicemails—but I will own that we are still working on making sure our staff have the tools they need to be responsive by phone and that our state phone systems are operating properly. If you are experiencing delays in return phone calls, please let Jhon Penn know and we will track down the issue.



The Grants. As you know, the unfortunate thing with some of the ESSER grants and data collection is that the money has to get out and spent—or else we have to give it back. And we are being audited and pestered by the Feds, so then we, in turn, pester you! We have pushed back on a number of things with them to no avail. We have also asked for extended timelines and deadlines in spending the ESSER money and have not been granted that either. I know these timelines are VERY challenging and I'm sorry about that.

I wanted to share the main pain points that I am hearing with you all, to make sure you know that I'm aware. I can't fix it all, but I will still work to ease as much burden as I can or at least develop a clear understanding of your reality and share that out with others. At the same time, we may still move forward on some of the things we need to. I will continue to develop our team to have understanding and empathy for what you all are going through and find ways to be flexible where we can. If there are other areas in which we can be more supportive of your work, please send those my way. The more specific you can be, the more action we can take to be a great partner.

Thanks so much for all you are doing to keep our schools open for students and families across Colorado. I hope you get a little rest this weekend.



Katy Anthes, Ph.D.
Commissioner

