

Concerning Alignment of Preschool to Postsecondary Education

Senate Bill 08-212

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My name is Frank Waterous, and I am a Senior Policy Analyst with the Bell Policy Center. The Bell is a nonpartisan, nonprofit organization dedicated to expanding opportunity for the people of Colorado.

The Bell Policy Center supports Senate Bill 08-212. We believe that the changes made possible through the bill represent a net opportunity gain for our students and our state. Specifically, these changes are important steps forward in creating an education system that will help more students graduate from school and acquire the skills and competencies needed for postsecondary academic and career success.

The bill is quite extensive—40 pages as introduced. It includes a wide range of provisions related to vision, structure, and process in reforming our education system. In my comments today, I want to focus on the vision in the bill—and specifically on what the Bell believes are two of the most critical and beneficial elements of that vision.

1. The bill asks us to refocus our attention on the *skills and competencies* that students need for success in their postsecondary lives, rather than on traditional coursework, units, or seat-time. And it acknowledges that these skills and competencies are needed by *all* students, regardless of whether they intend to pursue postsecondary studies or enter the workforce directly. Such a focus on *student* needs and *student* success, rather than on institutional needs and desires, is fundamental to P-20 education thinking.
2. The bill calls for the development of education standards for all students that are aligned with postsecondary and workforce readiness, but it also encourages local districts to create *multiple curricula* through which students can achieve them. There are many different styles and ways of learning, just as there are many different instructional methods for presenting rigorous material in ways that are relevant for students. One size does not fit all in education. The multiple curricular pathways approach acknowledges this fact, and once again focuses on *student* success.

An important note on this point: The creation of multiple curricular pathways is NOT the same as tracking, which would be completely unacceptable to us. Tracking establishes different curricula with different standards for different sets of students. Multiple curricular pathways allow the same standards to be taught through a variety of curricula and contexts that address differences in student learning styles, interests, and needs.

The Bell's support for the vision contained in SB 08-212 does not mean that there is nothing about it that gives us pause. For example, the issue of diploma "endorsements" is one that we believe needs more discussion and analysis before any decisions are made. Our view is consistent with that of the Governor's P-20 Council, which recommended additional study of endorsements prior to any policy action.

Further, the bill does not directly address the increased financial investment and commitment that will be required if the reforms outlined in it are to become reality. We believe that increased investments in a redesigned education system are crucial if we are to become the state that we aspire to be. And while we understand that specific fiscal estimates cannot be developed for all the bill's proposals at this time, we also believe that the people of Colorado need to know that we cannot achieve the goals set forth in it by simply reallocating current resources.

If a 21st century education system is a priority for our state, we must step up to the plate and fund it. And in the larger budgetary scheme, we must ultimately develop a comprehensive fiscal strategy that will allow Colorado to achieve all of its social and policy aspirations. This is a major focus of our work at the Bell.

Overall, the Bell Policy Center believes that Senate Bill 08-212 will help us create an education system that gives more students the skills and competencies needed for postsecondary success. In the long run, this will benefit both the students and the state, and will lead to increased opportunity for all Coloradans.

Thank you for the opportunity to share this information with you today.

If you have any questions, or if I can provide further information, please call me at 303-297-0456 or email me at waterous@thebell.org.