

Opinion-Editorials (Op-Eds) and Letters to the Editor (LTEs)

- **Op-Eds and LTEs are short articles in a newspaper’s editorial section. They can be very useful tools for getting your message out about certain legislation.**
- **Op-eds are typically written by experts in a given field, ranging between 650 and 800 words.**
- **LTE’s are particularly effective in uplifting community voices and perspectives. They are usually restricted to about 150 to 250 words.**

Op-Ed example:

Opinion: Colorado’s legislature and governor cannot go back on their promise to our students (Colorado Sun)

Colorado kids need and deserve some wins. During the 2024 legislative session, they got two big ones: A commitment to fully fund public schools for the first time in more than a decade, and a plan to distribute those funds so students across the state truly have what they need to learn.

Teachers, schools, district leaders, advocates, governors and many legislators on both sides of the aisle have been working for almost a decade to increase school funding and improve the school funding formula. So, it’s no exaggeration to say that eliminating the Budget Stabilization Factor, which had been used to limit state funding to schools and enacting a student-centered funding formula through House Bill 1448 were two of the most significant investments in Colorado kids in our state’s history.

But for these two policy wins to stick, Gov. Jared Polis and the legislature will have to hold together and hold the line for our schools and our kids, even in a challenging fiscal environment. For many years, Colorado has spent less to support each student in the public school system than the national average. Worse, the state has distributed funding to districts using a formula that directed a greater share of funding to wealthy, higher cost-of-living districts than to districts where students face the most barriers to educational opportunity.

The changes the legislature made in 2024 could increase funding for Colorado schools by \$500 million per year. All 178 school districts would see funding increases starting in the 2025-26 school year, and these increases would be most apparent in districts serving students living in poverty, students who are learning English, and students with special learning needs.

That means: These funding increases would allow school districts to raise teacher pay and reduce workloads, provide more students with access to the mental health and tutoring support they need to succeed, and allow the state to further shrink, or even close, persistent gaps in academic outcomes between student groups.

Now, Colorado’s leaders need to follow through on their promises.

Colorado’s tax policy — known as the Taxpayer’s Bill of Rights — means the state is in a constant state of budget shortfall. Sometimes we call the shortfall “budget constraints” or “limited discretionary spending.” For many years we disguised it as the Negative Factor, and then the Budget Stabilization Factor.

This past summer, the shortfall took the form of two ballot initiatives (which were withdrawn) that would have taken an estimated \$3 billion out of the state budget overnight, forcing an instant reversal of the elimination of the Budget Stabilization Factor and the new school funding formula.

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- Opt Ed cont'd

Policymakers met in an August special session to come to a property tax compromise to avert this situation, only to find that now the state needs to come up with \$900 million to meet our reserve requirements. The governor's budget proposal for the 2025-26 school year includes the dollars needed to turn on the new school funding formula, but with some big accommodations to address the shortfall. Some school leaders found those accommodations inappropriate and told the Colorado Joint Budget Committee in an **official letter**. We encourage all stakeholders to come to the table to negotiate and find a path forward until the budget is finalized in the spring. Until then, no matter how challenging, the Governor and legislature must be absolute and steadfast in their commitment to the new funding formula, and the better-funded schools it will bring us.

We cannot balance the state budget by shortchanging Colorado's schools and students yet again. There has been good news for Colorado kids in the past few months: Half of our school districts saw year-over-year gains in math proficiency rates, according to the 2023 CMAS results graduation rates. More kids are taking advanced placement courses. Programs designed to help kids get valuable credentials, work experience, and college-level courses are maxing out enrollment. Even mental health is improving — according to the latest Healthy Kids Colorado survey.

Kids, and the schools that serve them, have risen to meet the challenges of our time. Now it is the state government's turn.

Colorado budget shortfalls will always be with us, and constraints are no excuse for letting kids down.

Gov. Polis and the state legislature must make the new school funding formula their top priority in the upcoming budget negotiations. Let Colorado kids keep their wins.

LTE Example

Let Colorado Kids Keep Their Wins

Colorado kids deserve fully funded schools, and in 2024, they finally got two big wins: a commitment to fully fund public education and a student-centered funding formula to ensure all students have what they need to succeed. These historic investments—eliminating the Budget Stabilization Factor and passing House Bill 1448 (a New School Finance Formula)—will bring an additional \$500 million annually to our schools, benefiting all 178 districts, especially those serving students in poverty, English learners, and students with special needs.

But these gains are at risk. Colorado's ongoing budget challenges must not become an excuse to shortchange students yet again. The governor and legislature must stand firm in their commitment to the new school funding formula, ensuring our schools can raise teacher pay, reduce workloads, and expand critical student support.

Colorado kids and schools are making progress. Now, it's the state's turn to follow through. Gov. Polis and the legislature must prioritize education in budget negotiations and protect these hard-won gains. Let's not take a step backward—our kids deserve better.

