

Written Testimony of
Sarah Grobbel, Assistant Superintendent of Career & Innovation
Cherry Creek School District

Before the U.S. House of Representatives
Committee on Small Business
Subcommittee on Innovation and Workforce Development

Hearing on Innovations in the School to Small Business Pipeline

November 22, 2019

Chairman Jason Crow, Ranking Member Balderson, and Members of the Subcommittee, thank you for holding this hearing at the Cherry Creek Innovation Campus in Cherry Creek School District as part of the Innovations in the School to Small Business Pipeline. I am honored to offer my perspective during this time of educational shift in the United States.

On behalf of the Cherry Creek School District Board of Education, President Karen Fisher and members Kelly Bates, Anne Egan, Angela Garland, and Janice McDonald, and Superintendent Dr. Scott Siegfried, we welcome you to Cherry Creek Schools and the Cherry Creek Innovation Campus.

In 2015, the Colorado Department of Education made changes to the graduation guidelines for the class of 2021. Cherry Creek Schools seized this opportunity to engage students, parents, educators, community members, business partners, and higher education leaders in a conversation regarding the portrait of a successful graduate in Cherry Creek Schools to create the vision of Cherry Creek 2021. It was through this work that Cherry Creek Schools changed its goals to *Inclusive Excellence* and *College and Career Preparedness and Success* as we recognized our goal to create learners who focus on innovation, critical thinking, real world experiences, project-based learning, relevancy, communication skills, adaptability and teamwork. The Cherry Creek Innovation Campus would be the cornerstone to this work, and my passion project over the next three years.

In November of 2016, the community and stakeholders of Cherry Creek Schools passed a local bond measure for the capital project which made the Cherry Creek Innovation Campus a reality for Cherry Creek Schools. The pathways include Advanced Manufacturing, Business Services, Health and Wellness, Hospitality and Tourism, IT/STEAM, Infrastructure and Engineering, and Transportation, including both aviation and automotive coursework. The campus is a stand-alone college and career preparedness facility accessible for high school students in the Cherry Creek Schools. With curriculum rooted in real-world skills and trade certifications ranging from the computer sciences to aviation to health and wellness as well as college credit options in all

pathways, this facility offers students a new bridge to college and viable, successful careers. More importantly, students are not asked to choose between workforce or college after high school. This programming is for students going on to two- and four-year colleges, military, or workforce, as well as aiding the student who is still trying to connect to his/her career passions and interests.

As is the mission of Cherry Creek Schools, the Innovation Campus was designed to inspire our students “*to think, to learn, to achieve, to care*” from the moment they walk through the main entrance. The intentionality in creating a partnership with industry is what has made this facility stand out across the country. We engaged industry partners to help us build the concept of each pathway as well as the curriculum and instruction. Principal Mark Morgan and his cadre spent endless hours over the last two years with our architect, contractor, student advisory group, community stakeholder group, and our industry partners to fulfill the vision of 2021 for the Cherry Creek Schools. We also used documents like the Colorado Talent Pipeline Report to guide our pathway choices.

We stand on the shoulders of the pioneer Career and Technical Education teachers in our district who have built a solid foundation for 21st century professional coursework in our schools over the last decade. Our programming includes career exploration, Career & Technical Education courses tied to the Career & Technical Education career cluster model, internships, and apprenticeships. Over the past three years, we have also participated in Colorado’s legislated Career Development Incentive Program which recognizes the number of students earning industry credentials and participating in internships each year.

We are proud of the work we are doing with CareerWise Colorado in creating apprenticeship opportunities for our students. Through this partnership, we are successfully linking students to career opportunities with a focus on work-based competencies and postsecondary education for each apprentice. Our goal is to create an apprenticeship for each pathway in our Career & Technical Education coursework. This fall, we opened our newest apprenticeship, Future Educator Pathway apprenticeship. As the employer of the apprenticeship, we are hiring our current high school students who would like to pursue a degree in education as paraprofessionals working part-time in our K-8 schools. We are also investing in these apprentices by providing college credit for coursework necessary to earn a teaching certification. Like many industry partners, we are excited about the concept of “growing our own” to create a pipeline of educators that may help us fill the future job shortage in education.

The Cherry Creek Innovation Campus opened our doors on August 12, 2019 to nearly 1,000 students, with another 1,000 students expected next semester. Although we have much to be proud of at this stage, we recognize our work is not done. We will continue to focus on creating Pathways of Purpose for our students with a formalized Individualized Career and Academic Plan (ICAP) for every student from sixth through twelfth grade and beyond. We will also look at future bond measures which will allow our school district to add additional Pathways of Purpose for students in our district as part of Cherry Creek’s Future Forward strategic planning.

As we continue to strive to be the pipeline for our students from education to healthy and meaningful careers, we ask for your help. According to Education Week, the average per-pupil

funding in education across the United States is \$12,756 as of June 2019. This per-pupil spending amount is adjusted for regional cost differences across states, and it captures factors such as teacher and staff salaries, classroom spending, and administration, but not construction or other capital spending. Colorado ranks in the bottom five of all states at an average per pupil funding of \$10,053. This discrepancy in funding has caused many school districts in states like Colorado to look at local funding sources, especially partnerships with industry, to maintain the level of excellence expected by families and community members. Our success in the Cherry Creek Innovation Campus has been creating meaningful relationships with industry partners and higher education to provide our students with curriculum and instruction grounded in real-world experiences.

We ask that as a committee, you continue to include K-12 education in workforce development discussions, so we can continue to grow with you in these conversations. Encourage local business to engage with their community educational partners. Most importantly, focus on better funding sources for all K-12 schools throughout the country including the financial support of local business. What we have described today has proven to be a significant return on investment for students, community, industry, and local economy. We know what we have created together today will change education tomorrow, because this effort is not just education or industry but the perfect combination of both.