

Memo to School of Teacher Education

April 25, 2018

Colleagues:

As teachers participate in days of action tomorrow and Friday and schools close, we should reflect on what this means for our students and schools across the state.

At UNC we do our best to prepare competent educators. We work closely with our candidates in schools and have a bird's eye view of the rewards and challenges they experience. We endeavor to provide our candidates with a realistic preview of the career they are entering. Therefore, it is important that we afford our students, particularly those in the field, support as they attempt to understand the issues involved in the days of action and school closures.

Prospective educators need to understand funding models for education and the consequences of inadequate and widely disparate funding on children and schools. Also important is an understanding of the foundations and history of education and the profession of teaching in Colorado and the US. We should assist our candidates as they reflect on the rights and responsibilities of educators today and as they consider the meaning of public displays and debates related to important matters in education.

All jobs change over time, yet the increasing responsibilities and demands on the teaching profession are unique. Funding for education has been on the decline for years, and Colorado is rapidly racing to the bottom of US states on education funding metrics. Although money will not solve all problems, it certainly helps fix obvious structural issues and begins the process of addressing impediments to equity across schools and districts. Accountability for student achievement is vital but should not come at the expense of a whole-child view of education. The changing demographics of school populations, coupled with huge disparities in income level and wealth, result in new challenges for both teacher preparation programs and for teachers, who regularly spend their own money to support children. School shootings are infrequent, yet when they occur, they are vivid reminders of the suffering some students experience in our schools.

I realize that, while the events this week come right at the end of our semester and I am sure that many of you already do this, going forward, I encourage you to please take the initiative to discuss these issues with our students and provide them with perspective as they attempt to process the education-related events that are occurring in Colorado and across the nation. And to our students—I encourage you to bring the topics up with our faculty. Different opinions and proposed solutions exist regarding many of the topics and meaningful, considered, fact-based conversations should occur.

UNC has always taken the lead in addressing challenges in education. For example, over the last few years we have launched the Colorado Center for Rural

Education, which develops partnerships between school districts and institutions of higher education and tackles the shortfall of educators in rural areas in Colorado. We have the largest Future Teacher Conference in the region to promote the teaching profession to high school students. Our collaboration with the Colorado School of Mines is an innovative partnership that affords more science and math students the opportunity to gain a teaching license. We provide ongoing professional development to educators in the field through centers and institutes such as the Bresnahan-Halsted Center, Center for the Education and Study of Gifted, Talented, and Creative Learners, Hewitt Institute, Mathematics and Science Teaching Institute, Northern Colorado Math Circle, Tointon Institute, and others, as well as partnerships with organizations such as the United States Holocaust Memorial Museum and the Anti-Defamation League. Our faculty and administrators are members of important state and national committees and regularly testify before legislative bodies regarding education topics. Sadly, but necessarily, we recently added an Active Shooter/School Violence training for our candidates.

In all of these efforts we are advocates for quality education and champions for educators and the children in our schools.

Thank you for all you do on behalf of our students and thanks to our students for your commitment to education.

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