

Jennifer Jones
Director, Public Affairs

SB16 – 005
March 24, 2016
Senate Education Committee

Chairman Hill, Senator Marble and members of the committee, my name is Jennifer Jones and I am the Director of Public Affairs for the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce, an organization representing over 3,000 businesses and their 300,000 employees. For nearly 150 years, the Chamber has been the voice for both small and large businesses across the seven-county metro region; and we are here to voice our strong opposition to Senate Bill 005 on behalf of the Chamber and our members.

Education is a key pillar of the Denver Metro Chamber's work because the success of Colorado's economy depends on having well educated, innovative talent to fill businesses' needs. The Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce has a long history of supporting improvements to Colorado's schools.

In order for our state to succeed economically, we must be able to produce enough highly skilled workers to meet economic demand. We know that in just four years, 74% of jobs will require post secondary education, so we must ensure our kids get to and through education beyond high school and are ready for Colorado's jobs of today and our future.

The foundation of a homegrown, strong workforce in Colorado must include statewide learning benchmarks and testing that focuses on measureable outcomes. This is the only way we will know if our kids are on track to find their path to college and career. Statewide learning benchmarks allow us to see how our kids are doing from district to district and state to state. And they help inform school choices for families.

We supported last year's HB15 - 1323 which dramatically decreased the time students spent taking tests and eased the burden on schools. Some of the most dramatic reductions in testing were at the high school level, where we eliminated state CMAS tests in 10th, 11th, and 12th grade.

As a part of that compromise, the state decided to keep 9th grade tests in two core subjects. Studies show that success in ninth grade is highly predictive of high school graduation rates. We stand by the legislature's decision to preserve those 9th grade tests because it allows us to assess how our kids are doing as they enter high school, establish a baseline for growth, and provide valuable comparative information.

Although the state may continue looking for ways to streamline testing requirements; policymakers shouldn't do that at the cost of undermining what we've worked so hard to achieve. We must continue holding our students, teachers and schools accountable to high standards so we can compete in the global economy of today and tomorrow. Repealing statewide assessments in the ninth grade will only delay implementation of the high standards we need for our students.

On behalf of the Denver Metro Chamber of Commerce and our members, I respectfully ask for a "no" vote on SB-005. I am also authorized to ask for a "no" vote on behalf of our partners at Colorado Succeeds. Thank you.