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There's no easy fix for the shortcomings in Colorado's school financing system.

Since 2009, the state Legislature has taken liberties with the school funding formula mandated by the voter-approved Amendment 23, using the so-called "negative factor" to cut funding every year. The Legislature has relied on circuitous reasoning and intricate formulas to withhold crucial money from school districts across the state.

We've felt the impact of those cuts in the Cherry Creek School District. We've been underfunded by about \$50 million annually. Since 2012, \$380 million has been withheld from Cherry Creek. We're facing a shortfall of more than \$20 million for the 2017-2018 school year. These cuts have the potential to impact every facet of district operations, from recruiting new teachers to maintaining a reasonable class size.

It's a crisis that's tied to our fundamental priorities as Coloradans, one that won't find an easy remedy from the state's nascent marijuana industry. People keep asking me, 'Where's the pot money?' The short answer is that the Cherry Creek School District hasn't received any. The longer answer is about how the money actually is allocated.

The lead-up to the legalization of marijuana in 2012 brought plenty of rhetoric regarding the positive impact on public schools in Colorado. Voters were told that taxes on legal marijuana would prove to be a windfall for cash-strapped school districts; millions of dollars' worth of education cuts from the state would be offset by new income from a new vice tax.

That's not what happened. In the fiscal year 2014-15, for example, taxes from the sale of recreational marijuana in Colorado totaled \$77.9 million, \$66.1 million of which came from special sales and excise taxes.

For context, the state's general fund is about \$9.7 billion, and the total state budget is \$26 billion. By state law, the first \$40 million of the excise taxes from marijuana sales went toward capital improvements for poor and rural school districts, and the remainder went toward marijuana education, treatment and regulation and enforcement programs across the state.

The Cherry Creek School District saw none of that money, nor did most of the other large school districts in the Denver metro area.

Similarly, the Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) grants allotted for the 2016-17 year by the State Board of Education will have no impact on Cherry Creek Schools. Funding for projects in Aurora Public Schools, Adams 14 and Westminster all carry the contingent of matching funds from the school districts,

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and the vast majority of the 31 awarded grants will go to rural districts far outside of the metro area.

But to be eligible for the grants, those school districts must pass a local bond issue first, or already have matching capital funds available.

So far, the only thing that the legalization of marijuana has brought to our schools has been marijuana.

This isn't a new story. Taxes on alcohol and tobacco haven't fixed the state's quandary when it comes to funding public education, nor have revenues from lotteries or casinos.

The reality is that any fix will have to come from a much more complex and overarching effort. To offer our students the resources they need to learn, we need a much more profound change at the state level, one that comes down to real and lasting change. It comes down to spelling out our collective priorities as Coloradans, to urging our elected representatives to do the hard work and make sure that students in Colorado receive the funding spelled out by a voter-approved constitutional amendment.

That effort is much more complex than any easy fixes offered by legal marijuana.



To inspire every student to think, to learn, to achieve, to care.

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