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**LA VOZ**  
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## Letter to the Editor

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10/12/2021

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### Look before you LEAP

Latinos, the poor, and the communities affected by underfunded public schools should be alarmed about Proposition 119. This proposition is asking taxpayers to divert \$21 million plus per year from our public schools to an independently-run government bureaucracy to fund after school programs run by private companies. Public schools are underfunded already. Why would we allow public school money to be used for private profit? Didn't we witness last year teachers, parents, and students picket the state capitol demanding better funding for our schools and teachers? The truth must be told about the ballot initiative called LEAP (Learning Enrichment and Academic Progress) program.

Proposition 119 is deceptive. It claims the money will help poor children bridge the learning gap caused by the pandemic, but then diverts \$21 million of public education funds from the State Land Trust funds to an independent agency to contract with private providers. This hurts the schools and children it claims to help!

Colorado's constitution clearly states that State Land Trust monies must be used solely for funding public schools. Since 1876, Latinos, including undocumented students, have benefitted by receiving a free public education using land trust monies. Because Colorado law prohibits non-citizens from accessing public benefits, it is unlikely that many undocumented Latino families would qualify or apply for the LEAP program.

Currently, a portion of marijuana taxes is sent to the Colorado Department of Education to fund grants for public schools across the state. Why would voters allow the creation of another huge government agency to collect an additional \$137 million of marijuana taxes? Why would voters allow this agency with huge administrative costs to contract with private education providers using public taxes?

Colorado was sent \$510 million of Coronavirus Relief funds to address student "learning loss". Those monies were sent to school districts to address the unique needs of their students. Districts chose to use these funds for hiring more teachers, paraprofessionals and tutors, or before and after school programs, or counselors and mental health programs. Decisions were made by the local school boards, professional educators, and parents who know our children best, not by businessmen in a downtown boardroom.

Proposition 119 is a back door attempt at starving public schools and privatizing public education. It's a scam. Ya basta!

Manuel Solano is a consumer and civil rights attorney and the former regional director of MALDEF (Mexican American Legal Defense Education Fund).

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