

# COLORADO



## *Flexibility Guide*

2023





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### ***Disclaimer***

This is not a legal document and is not to be relied on as such. Neither the list of areas of flexibility nor information summarizing legislative mandates and administrative rules is exhaustive. The information provided should also not be considered a complete synopsis of the state's requirements or the obligations the state imposes on local boards, districts, schools, or other entities. Passages quoted from the legislative and administrative codes reflect text made available through <http://www.lpdirect.net/casb/crs> as of March 2023. Please consult official versions of source documents for current requirements.

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# I. Introduction

Across Colorado, and throughout the nation, there is a growing acknowledgement that public education system transformation must occur in order to better prepare learners for the changes taking place in the world around them. The pandemic amplified the preexisting challenges driving the need for change, and the realization that systems must do a better job of meeting each student where they are individually, and establishing foundations to prepare all students with the skills needed for college, career, and life. Changes should, to the greatest extent possible, constitute improvements to both longstanding practices, such as assessments that gauge student progress and proficiency, and newer approaches like on-line and blended learning opportunities. In some instances, innovation will be necessary to achieve results that outpace incremental improvement.

Building on longstanding commitments to local control and open enrollment (school choice), in the first decade of the new century, Colorado's state leaders took several monumental steps to address emerging challenges, including, but not limited to:

## **INCREASING FLEXIBILITY FOR HIGH SCHOOL GRADUATION REQUIREMENTS THAT USE DEMONSTRATIONS OF COMPETENCIES**

The general assembly expanded the duties of the State Board of Education (State Board) to require the adoption of a comprehensive set of graduation guidelines; and requiring each local board of education to develop, through a community-based process, *“a blueprint for the education system in the community and to determine the skills students will need to be successful after graduation.”*<sup>1</sup> Today, Graduation Guidelines include a state-defined menu of college and career-ready demonstrations from which local boards and districts can create their own list of options for students. Students entering the 9th grade in the fall of 2017, and the first graduating class in 2021-22,<sup>2</sup> were the first called on to demonstrate competency in order to graduate from high school.<sup>3</sup>

Graduation Guidelines establish shared expectations (and thus are included in this section) only in that they define minimum standards that a local board must meet or exceed adopting its own high school graduation requirements. There is considerable flexibility within the Guidelines, including options for students and their families, as well as opportunities for local policymakers and educators to tailor requirements and instruction.

1 [C.R.S. 22-2-106 State board - duties - rules; C.R.S. 22-32-109 Board of education - specific duties - definitions](#)

2 The use of the revised guidelines were used for the graduating class of 2021-2022, which was a delay of one (1) year, due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

3 Colorado Department of Education. [Graduation Guidelines Engagement Toolkit](#) (2014)

## ENCOURAGING AND SUPPORTING LOCALLY-DESIGNED INNOVATION AND OPTIONS FOR STUDENTS

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In 1993, the general assembly adopted the [Charter Schools Act](#),<sup>4</sup> recognizing, among other things, that “[D]ifferent pupils learn differently and public school programs should be designed to fit the needs of individual pupils and that there are educators, citizens, and parents in Colorado who are willing and able to offer innovative programs, educational techniques, and environments but who lack a channel through which they can direct their innovative efforts.”<sup>5</sup>

Building on this foundation, through the [Innovation Schools Act of 2008](#),<sup>6</sup> the general assembly detailed legislative findings and the intention “to meet the educational needs of a diverse and constantly changing student population;...to encourage **intentionally diverse approaches to learning and education** within individual school districts;...and to encourage school districts, where appropriate, to create and manage a **portfolio of schools that meet a variety of education needs**, including identifying elementary, middle or junior high, and high schools to collectively operate as a vertically integrated **innovation zone** of schools.” [Emphasis added] Under the Act, a school may elect to operate as a Community School.

More recently, in a statement of legislative priorities, the State Board expressed a commitment “to working with the Governor, the Colorado Legislature, school districts and stakeholders to **re-envision learning for the future**.”<sup>8</sup> [Emphasis added] For the 2021 legislative session, this included support for policy that:

- Ensures all students have access to the quality instruction needed to meet the Colorado Academic Standards and drive student-directed learning experiences towards essential skills.
- Provides every student with high quality educational choices and varied learning experiences to best meet his/her individual learning needs.
- Ensures parents have access to information about education programs, their child’s academic achievement, and the opportunities to participate in related discussions and decisions on behalf of their child.
- Supports districts in their efforts to build robust family, community, and industry partnerships to ensure all students develop lifelong learning skills.
- Provides flexibility to schools and districts that deliver high quality evidence-based services with improved student outcomes.<sup>9</sup>

With these statements, and the creation of even more opportunities for locally-driven innovation, state leaders have set important cornerstones for what is now a statewide K-12 education system that promotes student-centered learning. Many elements of this focus on student-centered learning are highlighted in this guide, as they are well-positioned to:

1. Dramatically expand opportunities and choices for students and their families; and
2. Provide flexibility and support to educators in tailoring instruction and related services to customize learning for student success.

The purpose for this guide is to bring clarity and transparency to the student-centered innovation opportunities that exist today, so that they may be used, to the greatest extent possible, by all who are “**Ensuring equity and opportunity for every student, every step of the way**.”<sup>10</sup> [Emphasis added] This is the mission of the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) and a priority for education leaders across the state.

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4 [C.R.S. 22-30.5-101](#), et al. [Charter Schools Act](#)

5 [C.R.S. 22-30.5-102](#) [Legislative Declaration](#)

6 [C.R.S. 22-32.5-101](#), et al. [Innovation Schools and Innovation School Zones Within School Districts](#)

7 [C.R.S. 22-32.5-102](#) [Legislative Declaration](#)

8 Colorado Department of Education. [2021 Legislative Priorities](#)

9 [C.R.S. 22-32.5-102](#) [Legislative Declaration](#); Colorado Department of Education. [2021 Legislative Priorities](#)

10 Colorado Department of Education. [CDE’s Vision, Mission and Strategic Plan](#)



## II. Achieving a Vision for Student-Centered Learning: Every Student, Every Step of the Way

Achieving a student-centered vision requires collaboration among students and their families; district and school staff; as well as other stakeholders and community partners.

### What's So Different About Student-Centered Learning?

Student-centered learning leverages student interest and customized support to boost engagement, improve achievement, and empower lifelong learning.

**From the perspective of students and their families,** student-centered learning expands opportunities for learners to explore their interests and select learning environments that meet their needs, both in and outside of the classroom.

1. Student choices often extend to the combination of learning activities and experiences they engage in to earn credits, progress to the next level of learning, and graduate from high school.
2. Credit accumulation, progression, and graduation might even be based on a student's demonstration of mastery of knowledge and skills, rather than completion of a fixed number of course hours, which creates opportunities for a student to spend more time on some concepts (and receive more individualized instruction and support, as needed) and move more quickly through other concepts or areas of study once competency in them is achieved.

**From the school and district perspective, as well as that of their community-based partners,** building, administering, and continuously improving a student-centered education system involves supporting a variety of approaches and high-quality learning models, many anchored in policies which allow students to move ahead — to the next concept, course, or grade — once they have demonstrated mastery of academic content and related skills. Student-centered learning also compels local flexibility so that schools and systems can adapt to changing circumstances and seize opportunities that leverage emerging community-based learning opportunities.

From both perspectives, enabling individualized learning plans and expanding pathways are strategies that can be used to make sure each learner has high-quality learning opportunities to choose from, guidance in navigating (and even designing) the best choices, and ongoing support toward success.

# The Colorado Approach: Achieving Shared Expectations Through Local Control, Flexibility, Choice and Innovation

Colorado prides itself as being a “local control” state and this practice extends to most facets of governmental administration. In public education, this is seen by the high level of autonomy afforded to school districts for operating locally-designed educational models and the proliferation of diverse designs such as STEM schools, schools with International Baccalaureate programs, Alternative Education Campuses (or AECs), magnet programs, early colleges, community schools, and many others. Local control has been further extended in the state by creating multiple pathways for school-level autonomy. Colorado currently has over 265 charter schools in the state — each run by independent non-profits. In addition, the [Innovation Schools Act of 2008](#),<sup>11</sup> described above, set Colorado apart as a national leader in promoting innovation and autonomy in district-managed schools, yet it was not the first monumental action taken by state leaders to expand opportunities for students.

Ultimately, local control and innovation exists to support the creation of a highly individualized learning pathway for each student — leading to college and career readiness. Beginning in 1990, every school district was required to adopt policies and procedures allowing open enrollment in any program or school operated by the district — for both resident and nonresident pupils.<sup>12</sup> In 2021, this statute was further expanded to ensure open enrollment for inbound active duty military families as well.<sup>13</sup>

Colorado has also embraced the development of secondary programs that advance each student’s postsecondary and workforce readiness. From the development of a graduation guidelines framework to expansion of concurrent enrollment opportunities for all, the state’s vision is that all students are not only graduating with foundational academic skills and competencies, but also first-hand experience with college and career that will help unlock fulfilling adult futures.

Today, these and many other state actions constitute a set of innovation milestones that have shaped the current landscape. (See Table 1. Innovation Milestones) Within this landscape, the experiences of students are further shaped by state actions that have led to the establishment of shared expectations and also created space for student-centered learning practices to take root.

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11 [C.R.S. 22-32.5-101, et al. Innovation Schools and Innovation School Zones Within School Districts](#)

12 [C.R.S. 22-36-101 Choice of programs and schools within school districts](#)

13 [C.R.S. 22-36-107 Inbound active duty military families - school enrollment - registration - legislative declaration - definitions](#)

**TABLE 1. INNOVATION MILESTONES**

<b>1990</b>	<p><b>Public Schools of Choice</b> The general assembly laid the foundation for school choice policies that have been expanded and revised over more than three decades.<sup>14</sup></p>
<b>2007</b>	<p><b>Graduation Guidelines</b> Colorado Revised Statutes were amended to require the State Board to adopt guidelines for local adoption of high school graduation requirements that are aligned with four-year public postsecondary academic admission standards.<sup>15</sup></p> <p><b>Online Education Programs</b> The general assembly required immediate action “to ensure quality and accountability in the online educational programs offered within the state.” In doing so, it authorized the State Board to establish quality standards for all online schools and programs and to certify Multi-District Online Schools.<sup>16</sup></p> <p><b>Empowering Digital Learning for All Act</b> The general assembly established the Statewide Supplemental Online and Blended Learning Program to increase the state’s “investment in the expansion of affordable, high-quality supplemental online education courses and blended learning support.”<sup>17</sup></p>
<b>2008</b>	<p><b>Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K)</b> As described by CDE, “the goal of CAP4K is to align Colorado’s preschool through postsecondary education system calling for new standards and assessments for Colorado’s children, with a focus on both school readiness and postsecondary and workforce readiness.”<sup>18</sup></p> <p><b>School Readiness</b> As required by CAP4K, the State Board defined School Readiness as “both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students enrolled in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten. School readiness is enhanced when schools, families, and community service providers work collaboratively to ensure that every child is ready for higher levels of learning in academic content.”<sup>19</sup></p> <p><b>Preschool Individualized Readiness Plans</b> CAP4K requires school districts to “ensure all children in publicly-funded kindergarten programs receive an individual school readiness plan that addresses the academic standards and skill areas students need to be ready for higher levels of learning.” Results of a district-administered school readiness assessment are to be used to inform each child’s plan.<sup>20</sup></p>

14 [C.R.S. 22-36-101, et al. Public Schools of Choice](#)

15 [C.R.S. 22-2-106 State board - duties - rules](#)

16 [C.R.S. 22-30.7-101, et al. Online Education Programs](#)

17 [C.R.S. 22-5-119 Statewide supplemental online and blended learning program - contract - legislative declaration - definitions](#)

18 Colorado Department of Education. [ICAP Background](#)

19 Colorado Department of Education. [SB08-212 Goals and Accomplishments - CAP4K: Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids](#) (citing Colorado State Board of Education, 2008) (2014)

20 Colorado Department of Education. [SB08-212 Goals and Accomplishments - CAP4K: Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids](#) (2014)

<p><b>2008</b></p>	<p><b>Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR)</b>          State code was amended to establish requirements of both the State Board and local education providers.</p> <p>The State Board must adopt a description of postsecondary and workforce readiness which, among other things, describes the knowledge and skills that are required for a student to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR).<sup>21</sup></p> <p>Local education providers (LEPs) must ensure that the curricula content for high school subject areas included in PWR are aligned “such that a student who successfully completes the curricula will be prepared to demonstrate postsecondary and workforce readiness prior to or upon attaining a high school diploma.” Such curricula constitute the PWR program for each high school operated by the LEP.<sup>22</sup></p> <p><b>Innovation Schools Act of 2008</b>          State code was amended to encourage and support innovation in education with the goal of achieving improved student achievement. This included the authorization of several innovation designations and the opportunity for designated entities to obtain waivers of state statutes and regulations:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Innovation Schools</li> <li>➔ Innovation School Zones within School Districts</li> <li>➔ Districts of Innovation<sup>23</sup></li> </ul>
<p><b>2009</b></p>	<p><b>Individual Career and Academic Plans (ICAP)</b>          State code was amended to require State Board rules mandating that all students in grades 9-12 “have access to a process within their high school to create and manage an individual career and academic plan (ICAP)” that is designed to achieve the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Assist a student and the student’s parent or legal guardian in exploring the postsecondary career and educational opportunities available to the student;</li> <li>➔ Aligning course work and curriculum;</li> <li>➔ Applying to postsecondary education institutions;</li> <li>➔ Securing financial aid; and</li> <li>➔ Entering the workforce<sup>24</sup>.</li> </ul> <p>In early 2010, the State Board approved Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans.<sup>25</sup></p> <p><b>Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act</b>          State code was amended to establish the Accelerating Students Through Concurrent Enrollment (ASCENT) Program to, among other things, increase the percentage of students who participate in postsecondary education, especially among low-income and traditionally underserved populations,<sup>26</sup> and to allow for the designation of early college high schools.<sup>27</sup></p>

21 [C.R.S. 22-7-1008 Postsecondary and workforce readiness description - adoption - revision](#)  
 22 [C.R.S. 22-7-1015 Postsecondary and workforce readiness program - technical assistance](#)  
 23 [C.R.S. 22-32.5-101, et al. Innovation Schools and Innovation School Zones Within School Districts](#)  
 24 [C.R.S. 22-2-136 Additional duty - state board - individual career and academic plans - standards - rules](#); Colorado Department of Education. [ICAP Background](#)  
 25 [1 CCR 301-81 Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans](#)  
 26 [C.R.S. 22-35-101, et al. Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act](#)  
 27 [C.R.S. 22-35-101, et al. Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act](#)

<p><b>2015</b></p>	<p><b>Pathways in Technology (P-Tech) Early College High Schools</b></p> <p>The general assembly recognized the value of making P-Tech schools available to students and created an opportunity for local education providers to operate such schools with the approval of the Commissioner of Education and Executive Director of the Department of Higher Education.<sup>28</sup></p> <p><b>Graduation Guidelines</b></p> <p>The State Board adopted Graduation Guidelines, which include ICAP requirements, and allow students (within each school district’s graduation requirements) to choose from a <a href="#">Menu of Options</a> (allowing learning in and out of the classroom) “to demonstrate their readiness for career, college and the military, based on at least one measure in Reading, Writing, and Communicating, and one measure in Mathematics.” The guidelines decouple a student’s accumulation of credits toward graduation from historic requirements establishing minimum hours of instruction necessary for course completion.<sup>29</sup></p>
<p><b>2016</b></p>	<p><b>Statewide Supplemental Online and Blended Learning Program</b></p> <p>House Bill 16-1222 created the Statewide Supplemental Online and Blended Learning Program to expand access so that all students would have access to at least one supplemental online course each year — if they sought out such course — and to accelerate educator competency with administering blended learning programs.<sup>30</sup></p>
<p><b>2017</b></p>	<p><b>CDE Strategic Plan (2017-2023)</b></p> <p>CDE published a strategic plan establishing “five overarching goals that are focused on supporting students through every step of their schooling” and key initiatives include personalized learning for students at the earliest grades (with an emphasis on early literacy and school readiness) to ensuring for a diversity of educational pathways that personalize opportunities for students for college and career readiness.<sup>31</sup></p> <p><b>Publication of The State of Education</b></p> <p>The State of Education, a plan developed by Colorado’s Education Leadership Council, is a roadmap for educators, policymakers, business and community leaders, and others to identify ways to drive Colorado’s education system forward, together. It includes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ A vision framework, which identifies what Coloradans want from their education system;</li> <li>➔ The principles of a world-class education system that can help us achieve that vision; and</li> <li>➔ Practical improvement strategies that align to these principles.</li> </ul> <p><b>Diploma Endorsements Approved for STEM and Biliteracy</b></p> <p>The general assembly approved <a href="#">House Bill 17-1201</a> (Diploma Endorsement for STEM) and <a href="#">Senate Bill 17-123</a> (Diploma Endorsement for Biliteracy).<sup>32</sup></p>
<p><b>2018</b></p>	<p><b>Early College — Revised Definition</b></p> <p>The general assembly amended the definition of “early college” provided in the Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act to specify that an early college must provide “only a curriculum that is designed to be completed within 4 years and includes concurrent enrollment in high school and postsecondary courses such that, when a student completes the curriculum, the student has attained a high school diploma and a postsecondary credential or at least 60 credit hours toward completion of a postsecondary credential.”<sup>33</sup></p>

28 C.R.S 22-35.3-101, et al. [Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools](#)

29 Colorado Department of Education. [Graduation Guidelines](#); Colorado Department of Education. [Graduation Guidelines - Menu of College and Career-Ready Demonstrations](#)

30 [House Bill 16-1222](#). Colorado Legislature (2016)

31 Colorado Department of Education. [Strategic Plan 2017-2023](#) (updated Jan. 2023)

32 Colorado Department of Education. [Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness \(PWR\)](#)

33 [Senate Bill 18-225](#). Colorado Legislature (2018); [C.R.S. 22-35-103. Definitions](#)

<p><b>2019</b></p>	<p><b>Criteria Established for PWR Diploma Endorsement</b></p> <p>The State Board adopted updated PWR Diploma Endorsement criteria. This adoption followed initial adoption of PWR Endorsement criteria in 2013, after which the general assembly challenged the state to develop predictive indicators for success in attaining credentials in career, the military, and in college.<sup>34</sup></p> <p><b>Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot Program (ILOP)</b></p> <p>State code was amended to allow LEPs to participate in a program through which they offer their 9th through 12th grade students a variety of learning experiences that usually occur outside of the classroom, such as work-based learning, enrollment in postsecondary courses taught on college campuses, competency-based learning, or capstone projects. Participating LEPs may count any part-time student participating in ILOP as full-time students for purposes of school funding. The state’s intent is to have 100% of LEPs participating in this program by the 2025-26 school year.<sup>35</sup></p> <p><b>Concurrent Enrollment Expansion &amp; Innovation Grant Program</b></p> <p>The general assembly enacted the Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant Program to provide funding, through grants, to LEPs and institutions of higher education in order to offer more concurrent enrollment opportunities to students. Amendments in 2021 provided that American Rescue Plan Act funds are to be appropriated for this grant program.<sup>36</sup></p> <p><b>Innovation School Operating as a Community School</b></p> <p>The general assembly expanded the Innovation Schools Act (2008) options for a school’s development of an Innovation Plan to allow for operation as a community school. A community school is defined as a public school that:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ implements an annual asset and needs assessment that engages families, students, and educators in the community;</li> <li>➔ a strategic plan that includes the creation of problem solving teams;</li> <li>➔ a process to engage partners who bring assets and expertise to implement the school’s goals; and</li> <li>➔ a community school coordinator who is a staff member at the community school site.<sup>37</sup></li> </ul> <p><b>Local Accountability Systems — Grant Program</b></p> <p>The general assembly enacted a grant program to assist LEPs adopt local accountability systems — these systems are designed to supplement the state accountability system. According to the state, this also allows the state to learn lessons from innovation in the field.<sup>38</sup></p>
<p><b>2021</b></p>	<p><b>Supporting Active Duty Military Families with School Enrollment and School Choice</b></p> <p>The general assembly created additional public school choice opportunities for <i>“inbound active duty military families”</i>, requiring each school district and charter school to permit a qualifying military family member to submit an application for enrollment or open enrollment by electronic means and to register a child remotely, and establishing additional requirements <i>“to make the school enrollment process in Colorado, including school choice enrollment, more accessible for active duty military families.”</i><sup>39</sup></p>
<p><b>2022</b></p>	<p><b>CDE Strategic Plan Update</b></p> <p>CDE updated the strategic plan and included a section on the response to the COVID-19 crisis, acknowledging <i>“[A]s our understanding of learning opportunity losses continue, the department may need to add new strategies and adjust targets to better support acceleration of student learning in the future.”</i><sup>40</sup></p>

34 Colorado Department of Education. [PWR Diploma Endorsement](#)

35 [C.R.S. 22-35.6-101, et al. High School Innovative Learning Pilot Program](#); Colorado Department of Education. [Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot Program \(ILOP\)](#)

36 [C.R.S. 22-35-114 Concurrent enrollment expansion and innovation grant program - created - report - rules - legislative declaration - repeal](#)

37 [Senate Bill 19-102. Colorado Legislature \(2019\); C.R.S. 22-32.5-103 Definitions](#)

38 [C.R.S. 22-11-703 Local accountability system - grant program established - repeal](#); Colorado Department of Education. [Local Accountability System Grant](#)

39 [C.R.S. 22-36-107 Inbound active duty military families - school enrollment - registration - legislative declaration - definitions](#)

40 Colorado Department of Education. [Strategic Plan 2017-2022](#) (updated Jan. 2022)

The COVID-19 pandemic of recent years highlighted, in ways not previously anticipated, how valuable flexibility, choice, and innovation are, at all levels of the education system. A section of the CDE Strategic Plan Update (January 2022) details some impacts of the COVID-19 crisis, the agency’s response, as well as the need for ongoing adjustments and flexibility. CDE concludes, “As our understanding of learning opportunity losses continues, the department may need to add new strategies and adjust targets to best support acceleration of student learning in the future.” These same kinds of adjustments are almost certainly being made in every school and classroom to support every student, every step of the way, with considerable state support and flexibility for innovation.<sup>41</sup>

## COMMON EXPECTATIONS FOR STUDENT SUCCESS

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In keeping with CDE’s vision that all students graduate ready for college and careers, and prepared to be productive citizens of Colorado, and as required by Colorado Revised Statutes,<sup>42</sup> the State Board has adopted the [Colorado Academic Standards](#)<sup>43</sup> and a description of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) which incorporates the [Colorado Essential Skills](#),<sup>44</sup> and [Graduation Guidelines](#).<sup>45</sup>

By establishing common expectations, and minimum requirements for student achievement, the state has put in place a framework from which districts, schools, students, and families can make informed choices about the educational options made available and any additional supports needed.

### **Academic Standards**

The Academic Standards “identify the knowledge and skills that a student should acquire as the student progresses from preschool through elementary and secondary education” in at least reading, writing, mathematics, science, history, geography, visual arts, performing arts, physical education, world languages, English language competency, economics, civics, and financial literacy. As required by the Colorado Revised Statutes, the Academic Standards must include identification of the levels of attainment that a student must achieve in order to demonstrate readiness for promotion from elementary grades to middle school grades and from middle school grades to high school grades.<sup>46</sup>

### **School Readiness**

In 2008, the Colorado General Assembly passed Senate Bill 08-212. Known as Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), the law called for an alignment of the preschool through postsecondary education system to enable Colorado students to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college and careers. CAP4K includes an emphasis on kindergarten school readiness, calling for the Colorado State Board of Education to define school readiness and for educators to annually measure it. Under CAP4K, local education providers are required to administer a State Board adopted kindergarten school readiness assessment to each student in kindergarten and to ensure that all children in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten receive an Individual School Readiness Plan.<sup>47</sup>

Through the [Colorado READ Act](#),<sup>48</sup> the general assembly noted, among other things, that “...it is paramount that parents are informed about the status of their children’s educational progress and that teachers and schools receive the financial resources and other resources and support they need,... to effectively teach the science of reading, assess students’ achievement, and enable each student to achieve the grade level expectations for reading”.<sup>49</sup> A kindergarten school readiness assessment helps provide a clear understanding of the knowledge, skills, and behaviors of incoming kindergarten students. This information is used by teachers, families, and others to support student learning and development, including local decisions on instruction, resources, and community partnerships.

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41 Colorado Department of Education. [Strategic Plan 2017-2022](#) (updated Jan. 2022)

42 C.R.S. 22-7-1005 [Preschool through elementary and secondary education - aligned standards - adoptions - revisions](#); C.R.S. 22-7-1008 [Postsecondary and workforce readiness description - adoption - revision](#)

43 Colorado Department of Education. [2020 Colorado Academic Standards Online](#)

44 Colorado Department of Education. [Colorado Essential Skills](#) (updated May 2021)

45 C.R.S. 22-2-106 [State board - duties - rules](#)

46 C.R.S. 22-7-1005 [Preschool through elementary and secondary education - aligned standards - adoption - revisions](#)

47 Colorado Department of Education. [ICAP Background](#)

48 C.R.S. 22-7-1201, et al. [Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act \(Colorado READ Act\)](#)

49 C.R.S. 22-7-1202 [Legislative declaration](#)

### **Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR) and the Essential Skills**

The State Board and Colorado Commission on Higher Education (Commission), working with school, district, business, and community leaders throughout the state, adopted the following description of Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness (PWR):

*Colorado high school graduates demonstrate the knowledge and skills (competencies) needed to succeed in postsecondary settings and to advance in career pathways as lifelong learners and contributing citizens.*<sup>50</sup>

PWR requires a student to demonstrate a sufficiently high level of comprehension or skill to successfully complete, without need for remediation, the core academic courses identified by the Commission.

Essential skills describe the knowledge and skills that are required for a student to demonstrate PWR, including postsecondary planning skills and the ability to apply those skills, and, to the extent practicable, all of the following:

- ➔ Creativity and innovation skills
- ➔ Critical-thinking and problem-solving skills
- ➔ Communication and collaboration skills
- ➔ Social and cultural awareness
- ➔ Civic engagement
- ➔ Initiative and self-direction
- ➔ Flexibility
- ➔ Productivity and Accountability
- ➔ Character and Leadership
- ➔ Information Technology Application Skills
- ➔ Other skills critical to preparing students for the 21st century workforce and for active citizenship

### **Graduation Guidelines**

The Colorado Graduation Guidelines must be used by each local board in developing local high school graduation requirements that “*meet or exceed any minimum standards or basic core competencies or skills identified*” in the State Board’s guidelines. As required under the Colorado Revised Statutes, the Guidelines are aligned with both the State Board’s description of PWR, and postsecondary academic admission standards for students entering a four-year public postsecondary education institution.<sup>51</sup>

The general assembly required that the State Board, through its development of Graduation Guidelines, accomplished two important aims:

- ➔ **Academic Rigor** — Ensured that the state’s academic content standards are sufficiently rigorous so that students are exposed to subject matter adequate to prepare them for entrance into the workforce or postsecondary education system.
- ➔ **Competency in 21<sup>st</sup> Century Skills** — Recognized and acknowledged the importance of obtaining the core competency skills and standards to succeed in the twenty-first century, taking into account the importance of providing students and parents of graduation requirements, the multiple pathways a student can follow, and other information to help prepare a student for a successful high school experience.

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50 Colorado Department of Education. [We ICAP for PWR](#)

51 [C.R.S. 22-2-106 State board - duties - rules](#)

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [CDE. 2020 Colorado Academic Standards Online](#)
- [CDE. Colorado Essential Skills](#)
- [CDE. Office of Standards and Instructional Support](#)
- [CDE. Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness | CDE \(state.co.us\)](#)
- [CDE. PWR Practices](#)
- [CDE. PWR Playbook](#)
- [CDE. PWR Showcases](#)
- [CDE. Graduation Guidelines](#)
- [CDE. Graduation Guidelines: Menu of College and Career-Ready Demonstrations](#)
- [CDE. Graduation Guidelines FAQs](#)
- [CDE. District Guidance on the Graduation Guidelines](#)
- [CDE. Graduation Guidelines Engagement Toolkit](#)
- [CDE. Capstone and Performance Based Assessments: Slides, Practices, Resources](#)
- [CDE. The PWR of Graduation Guidelines: Slides, Practices, Resources](#)

## FLEXIBILITY, CHOICE AND INNOVATION

In January 2022, CDE updated the agency’s strategic plan, building on guiding principles that include **Flexibility, Choice and Innovation**. The plan harkens back to the Legislative Declaration of the [Innovation Schools Act of 2008](#), which includes a set of findings that recognize the state constitutional establishment of local control regarding instruction and the delivery of services, and a related belief that the autonomy afforded local boards is balanced with the need to empower school leaders to adapt their schools to local conditions and also to create opportunities for parents to have input regarding the design and delivery of educational services.<sup>52</sup>

*“The constitutional provisions regarding the public education system direct the general assembly to establish a thorough and uniform statewide system of public education, but they also recognize **the importance of preserving local flexibility by granting to each school district board of education the control of instruction in the schools of the school district;...the delivery of educational services must be tailored to the specific population of students they are intended to serve and that the parents of those students should have great opportunity for input regarding the educational services their children receive;...**”<sup>53</sup> [Emphasis added]*

Today, these broad principles — Flexibility, Choice and Innovation — are being upheld and expanded, as appropriate, through CDE’s administration and support of student-centered systems and the State Board’s exercise of its authority to grant waivers of state statutes and Board rules, as described later in this Guide.

The sections of this Guide that follow highlight many of the ways in which the state’s laws, policies, programs, assistance, and other support are creating space and opportunities — for students and their families, as well as for schools and districts — to realize their own vision for student-centered learning.

<sup>52</sup> [C.R.S. 22-32.5-102 Legislative Declaration](#)

<sup>53</sup> [C.R.S. 22-32.5-102 Legislative Declaration](#)

# Guide for Using this Guide: Student-Centered Learning Opportunities Made Available Through Flexibility, Choice and Innovation

The opportunities highlighted below are explained in greater detail in the next section of this Guide.

OPPORTUNITIES		
	FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES	FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS
<b>Individualized Student Plans</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ School Readiness Plan</li> <li>➔ READ Plan</li> <li>➔ Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Participation in plan development and implementation</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Locally-designed plan templates and processes</li> </ul>
<b>High School Graduation Requirements Based on Graduation Guidelines</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Local Graduation Requirements and Competency Options</li> <li>➔ Diploma Endorsements</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Choices for demonstration of competency/PWR</li> <li>➔ Diploma Endorsement options</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Locally-defined requirements developed using state guidelines</li> <li>➔ Possible waiver of state statute or regulations</li> </ul>
<b>Expanded Opportunities for Learning</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Blended and Online Education Programs</li> <li>➔ Options for Earning College Credit in High School</li> <li>➔ Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot (ILOP) Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Participation in blended and online education programs, including State Supplemental Online and Blended Learning Program, and enrollment in multi-district online school</li> <li>➔ Participation in postsecondary education courses</li> <li>➔ Participation in credit-bearing learning opportunities, which may take place outside of the classroom (within pilot schools)</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Locally-designed programs and instruction</li> <li>➔ Possible waiver of state statute or regulations</li> <li>➔ Optional Innovation Learning Plan development and ILOP participation</li> </ul>
<b>Choice of Programs and Schools</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Public Schools of Choice</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Application for enrollment in any program or school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Locally-developed policy, meeting state requirements</li> <li>➔ Optional prioritization of certain pupils</li> </ul>
<b>Other Flexibility and Support for Innovation</b> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ State Board General Waivers of Statutes and Rules</li> <li>➔ Innovative Designations and Related Waiver Opportunities</li> <li>➔ Local Accountability Systems — Grant Program</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Application for enrollment in any innovation school</li> </ul>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Local development, adoption, and implementation of innovation plan</li> <li>➔ Optional participation in program to design and use local accountability system</li> </ul>



## III. Individualized Student Plans

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statutes and State Board rules, students must be provided an opportunity to develop and implement one or more individualized plan that is designed, as described below.

### School Readiness Plans

In 2008, the Colorado General Assembly passed Senate Bill 08-212. Known as Colorado’s Achievement Plan for Kids (CAP4K), the law called for an alignment of the preschool through postsecondary education system to enable Colorado students to graduate with the knowledge and skills needed to be successful in college and careers. CAP4K includes an emphasis on kindergarten school readiness, calling for the State Board to define school readiness and for educators to annually measure it.

Each school district must provide all children in publicly-funded kindergarten programs with an individual school readiness plan (Readiness Plan) that addresses the academic standards and skill areas students need to be ready for higher levels of learning.<sup>54</sup>

Additionally, The Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (READ Act), passed by the Colorado legislature in 2012, focuses on early literacy development for all students and especially for students at risk to not read at grade level by the end of the third grade.<sup>55</sup> The READ Act focuses on literacy development for kindergarteners through third-graders. Students are tested for reading skills, and those who are not reading at grade level are given individual READ plans.

If a student is identified as having a significant reading deficiency, the student’s READ plan is to be created as a component of the student’s individualized readiness plan. (See READ Plans, below)

#### WHAT IS SCHOOL READINESS?

The State Board has defined “school readiness” as *“both the preparedness of a child to engage in and benefit from learning experiences, and the ability of a school to meet the needs of all students enrolled in publicly funded preschool or kindergarten. School readiness is enhanced when schools, families, and community service providers work collaboratively to ensure that every child is ready for higher levels of learning in academic content.”* Colorado Department of Education. SB08-212 Goals and Accomplishments - CAP4K: Colorado Achievement Plan for Kids (citing Colorado State Board of Education, 2008) (2014)

<sup>54</sup> C.R.S. 22-7-1014 Preschool individualized readiness plans - school readiness - assessments

<sup>55</sup> C.R.S. 22-7-1201, et al. Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act (Colorado READ Act)

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Participate in plan development and implementation

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Establish plan development process and template
- ➔ Adjust instruction, as appropriate
- ➔ Determine school readiness of students and identify any student having a significant reading deficiency

### RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-7-1014 Preschool individualized readiness plans - school readiness - assessments](#)

[CDE. Assessment Choices and School Readiness Plans](#)

[CDE. Kindergarten School Readiness Guide](#)

## READ Plan

Any LEP that finds that a student in kindergarten or grades 1 through 3 has a significant reading deficiency is required to provide that student and the student's family with a READ plan. If possible, the LEP is to meet with the student's parent to discuss the student's needs and to jointly create the student's READ plan. A teacher who has made and documented attempts to meet with the student's parent in order to jointly create the READ Plan may create the plan without the parent's participation. Every parent of a student who has a READ plan must receive a copy of the plan and is encouraged to work with the student's teacher in implementing the plan.

A [READ plan checklist](#) published by CDE details many of the ways the teacher and other school personnel are required to communicate and discuss aspects of a student's READ Plan with the parent. Specifically, a section on Family Communications requires:

- ➔ The parent receives ongoing, regular updates from the student's teacher concerning results of the intervention as described in the READ Plan and student's progress;
- ➔ The teacher identifies strategies for parents to use — designed to supplement the programming described in READ Plan; and
- ➔ The teacher communicates with parents around the progress they are seeing with READ goal supports being done at home.

In addition to literacy intervention and supports, with parent approval, students on READ Plans may be provided mental health support from the school psychologist, school social worker, or school counselor.

### ENGLEWOOD SCHOOL DISTRICT

Clayton Elementary School, located in the Englewood School District, is a recipient of the Early Literacy Grant. A total of 76.6% of students at Clayton are eligible for federal meal benefits and students at this school struggled with a high number of students with significant reading deficiencies. Beginning the 2017-18 school year, only 45% of this school's kindergartners through third graders were reading at or above benchmark reading levels. By the end of the year, 71% of the students were reading at or above benchmark. Through the Early Literacy Grant, the school was able to purchase a core reading resource and hire a literacy coach. Teachers at this school receive regular training, focusing on interpreting student data in order to provide interventions to those students who may need more help. This school is using Acadience Reading as the READ Act interim assessment and other diagnostic tools to determine student competency. [Colorado Department of Education. Colorado's Stories of Promising Practices. Promising Practice - Strong Foundations \(Early Literacy Grant\)](#)

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Participate in plan development and implementation
- ➔ Use strategies recommended for supporting the student's reading at home

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Establish plan development process and template
- ➔ Adjust instruction, as appropriate

## RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-7-1205 Reading competency - assessments - READ plan creation - parental involvement](#)

[C.R.S. 22-7-1201, et al. Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act \(Colorado READ Act\)](#)

[1 CCR 301-92 Rules for the Administration of the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act \(READ Act\)](#)

[Colorado CCR Document List \(state.co.us\)](#)

[Colorado State Board of Education. Crosswalk of Rule to Statute - 1 CCR 301-92 Rules for the Administration of the Colorado Reading to Ensure Academic Development Act \(READ Act\)](#)

[CDE. Colorado's Stories of Promising Practices](#)

[CDE. READ plans](#)

# Individualized Career and Academic Plan (ICAP)

Any Colorado public school students may develop an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP), using ICAP standards adopted by the State Board<sup>56</sup> and in accordance with an ICAP process developed by the district/school for students and families.<sup>57</sup>

ICAP guidance and supplemental resources provided by CDE note that ICAP is a multi-year process, and “*the vehicle by which Colorado students explore the world beyond high school and reflect their understanding and plan for these next steps.*”

## WHAT IS ICAP?

As defined by the State Board, an ICAP is an “*individualized plan, developed by the student and the student’s parent or legal guardian, in collaboration with their school counselors, school administrators, school personnel and/or Approved Postsecondary Service Providers that is used to help establish personalized academic and career goals, explore postsecondary career and educational opportunities, align course work and curriculum, apply to postsecondary institutions, secure financial aid, and ultimately enter the workforce school.*” [1 CCR 301-81 Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans - 2.00 Definitions](#)

Graduation Guidelines adopted by the State Board make the ICAP a requirement for high school graduation. ICAP is a tool that reflects how a student’s PWR is achieved, accomplished, and understood.

- Each student’s ICAP portfolio is required to include the student’s “*scores on basic skills or assessment tests and the student’s level of PWR at the time of the test. If a student’s scores indicate that he or she is at risk of being unable to demonstrate PWR prior to or upon high school graduation, school personnel shall work with the student and the student’s parent or legal guardian to create an intervention plan that identifies the necessary courses and education support services that the student requires to achieve PWR prior to or upon high school graduation to be prepared to continue into a postsecondary education option.*”<sup>58</sup>

In accordance with State Board rules:<sup>59</sup>

- ICAP access and assistance shall be provided at a minimum, annually in grades nine through twelve and should include participation by the student, parent or legal guardian, school counselors, school administrators, school personnel, and/or Approved Postsecondary Service Providers as applicable.
- The ICAP development process is also available to younger students, and the State Board may require the schools of the school districts to assist the students and his or her legal guardian to develop and maintain the student’s ICAP in any grade prior to ninth grade.
- Beginning no later than a student’s ninth grade year, the ICAP shall include goals for the student based on academic and career interests and shall identify required academic courses, career courses, electives, and Contextual and Service Learning opportunities aligned to the district’s programs of instruction related to PWR.
- School counselors, school administrators, school personnel, and/or Approved Postsecondary Service Providers at middle schools and high schools shall collaborate to ensure that each student and their parents or legal guardians receive information and advising regarding the relationship between ICAP and postsecondary goals and expectations.
- Schools will assist each student who has an ICAP to use the plan effectively to direct the student’s course selections and performance expectations in at least grades nine through twelve; to assist the student in meeting his or her academic and career goals as described in ICAP; and to enable the student to demonstrate PWR prior to or upon high school graduation at a level that allows the student to progress toward his or her postsecondary education goals, without requiring remedial education services or courses.

56 [1 CCR 301-81 Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans](#) (describing requirements of C.R.S. 22-2-136(1) Additional duty - state board - individual career and academic plans - standards - rules)

57 Colorado Department of Education. PWR Playbook

58 [1 CCR 301-81 Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans - 2.01\(1\)\(k\) Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans](#)

59 [1 CCR 301-81 Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans](#)

Each district must have an ICAP Implementation Plan which meets requirements adopted by the State Board, including policies and procedures which include:

- ➔ An explanation of the requirements for and benefits of concurrent enrollment, various career pathways, and opportunities available through military enlistment; and
- ➔ A clear designation of the roles and responsibilities of the student, parents or legal guardians, and district staff (including administration, counselors, and teachers).

During the process of developing an ICAP, the student and the student’s parent must be made aware of the importance of completing the free application for federal student aid or the Colorado application for state financial aid. Students and parents must also be provided help in completing the forms, if requested.

OPPORTUNITIES	
<p><b>FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Participate in plan development and implementation</li> <li>➔ Through the ICAP process, any student can incorporate aspects of the menu of options available for the demonstration of PWR and one or more diploma endorsements</li> <li>➔ An ICAP can include a range of learning options tailored to the student’s needs and interest, including concurrent enrollment, Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment (ASCENT), advanced learning plans (ALP), initial career and technical education (CTE), and industry career pathways</li> <li>➔ The ICAP process is connected with individualized education programs (IEP). As such, students with an IEP can use both tools to maximize choices regarding instruction and supports</li> <li>➔ If necessary, work with school personnel to create an intervention plan that identifies the necessary courses and education support services that the student requires to achieve PWR prior to or upon high school graduation</li> </ul>	<p><b>FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS</b></p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>➔ Use CDE resources for considering how existing efforts could be <u>connected to ICAP</u>, and to <u>devise/develop a process/model</u> that addresses the needs of your students and community</li> </ul>

<p><b>RELATED RESOURCES</b></p>	<p><a href="#">C.R.S. 22-2-136 Additional duty - state board - individual career and academic plans - standards - rules</a></p> <p><a href="#">1 CCR 301-81 Rules Governing Standards for Individual Career and Academic Plans</a></p> <p><a href="#">CDE. ICAP Background</a></p> <p><a href="#">CDE. ICAP Toolkit (2014)</a></p> <p><a href="#">CDE. ICAP Quality Indicators</a></p>
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## IV. High School Graduation Requirements (and Options) Based on Graduation Guidelines

### Local Graduation Requirements and Competency Options

Each local board of education was required by the general assembly to undertake a community-based blueprint development process to determine the skills students will need to be successful after graduation. Using the local blueprint, and the Colorado Graduation Guidelines, highlighted above (p. 10), the local board must establish local high school graduation requirements that:

- ⊕ meet or exceed the minimum standards, competencies, and skills identified in the Graduation Guidelines; and
- ⊕ allow students multiple, equally rigorous and valued pathways to demonstrate competency of the knowledge (academic proficiency in English, math, science, and social studies) and skills, using options local school boards and districts select from the approved Colorado menu of college and career-ready demonstrations.<sup>60</sup>

Although local boards are required to approve a school year of at least 1,080 hours of instruction, this approach essentially allows a local board to decouple a student's accumulation of credits toward graduation from historic requirements establishing minimum hours of instruction necessary for course completion.<sup>61</sup>

The Graduation Guidelines require a student to complete implementation of an Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP, *see* pp. 16-17), complete one course in Civics, one course that incorporates Genocide and Holocaust studies, and demonstrate PWR competency based on the Academic Standards and Essential Skills.

#### OPPORTUNITIES

##### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ⊕ Provide input on the locally-developed requirements

##### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ⊕ Locally developed blueprint
- ⊕ Locally developed graduation requirements

60 Colorado Department of Education. [Graduation Guidelines: Background and History](#)

61 C.R.S. 22-32-109 Board of education - specific duties - definitions; Colorado Department of Education. [Instructional Time Requirements](#)

## MENU OF COLLEGE AND CAREER-READY DEMONSTRATIONS

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Local school boards and districts select from a menu of options established by the State Board and eligible for use by a student in demonstrating college and career-readiness through the PWR.<sup>62</sup> The state-defined menu requires demonstrations in reading, writing, communicating, and mathematics. Satisfactory performance varies by option, some of which require a specified score. Options are as follows:

### ***Minimum Score Established***

- ➔ ACCUPLACER is a computerized test that assesses reading, writing, math, and computer skills.
- ➔ ACT is a national college admissions exam.
- ➔ ACT WorkKeys — National Career Readiness Certificate is an assessment that tests students' job skills in applied reading, writing, mathematics, and 21st century skills. Scores are based on job profiles that help employers select, hire, train, develop, and retain a high-performance workforce.
- ➔ ADVANCED PLACEMENT (AP) exams test students' ability to perform at a college level.
- ➔ ASVAB (Armed Services Vocational Aptitude Battery) is a comprehensive test that helps determine students' eligibility and suitability for careers in the military.
- ➔ IB exams assess students enrolled in the official IB Diploma Program.

### ***Passing Grade Per District and Higher Education Policy***

- ➔ CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT provides students the opportunity to enroll in postsecondary courses, simultaneously earning high school and college credit.

### ***Individualized***

- ➔ DISTRICT CAPSTONE is the culminating exhibition of a student's project or experience that demonstrates academic and intellectual learning.
- ➔ INDUSTRY CERTIFICATES are credentials recognized by business and industry.

### ***Statewide Scoring Criteria***

- ➔ COLLABORATIVELY DEVELOPED, STANDARDS-BASED PERFORMANCE ASSESSMENT allows students to demonstrate academic knowledge and essential skills.

Full implementation of the menu of options began for students graduating in the 2021-22 school year. Local education providers must report the measure by which each student has demonstrated PWR according to options included in local high school graduation requirements.<sup>63</sup>

## **OTIS SCHOOL DISTRICT**

In 2019, Otis School District began requiring every senior to complete a capstone project before graduating. This requires students to establish a proposal with their career interests, and follow this up with job-shadowing or internships in those particular fields. Students must then complete research papers and put together a portfolio and present the information to a panel of school officials and community members. To further encourage career preparation, students are then required to learn how to write resumes, how to create cover letters, and learn about financial management in senior seminar courses. Through this, students also learn how to apply for college scholarships and research colleges that would fit their life direction best. [Colorado Department of Education. Colorado's Stories of Promising Practices. Promising Practice ICAP - Northeast BOCES: Otis School District](#)

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<sup>62</sup> Colorado Department of Education. [Graduation Guidelines - Menu of College and Career-Ready Demonstrations](#)

<sup>63</sup> Colorado Department of Education. [Reporting Graduation Guidelines](#)

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Provide input on locally-selected demonstration options (from among options allowed by the state)
- ➔ Choice from among demonstration options offered by the district/school
- ➔ Participate in capstone design
- ➔ Select from among industry certificate opportunities

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Offer some or all of the state menu options
- ➔ Raise the minimum score on any assessment option
- ➔ Design capstones and industry certificate opportunities
- ➔ Adapt competency demonstrations necessary to accommodate students with disabilities, English learners, and gifted students in earning a standard diploma

### RELATED RESOURCES

[CDE. Graduation Guidelines Engagement Toolkit](#)

[CDE. Reporting Graduation Guidelines](#)

[CDE. Colorado's Stories of Promising Practices](#)

## Diploma Endorsements

Students may seek to obtain any of the following high school diploma endorsements by meeting criteria and other requirements.

### PWR ENDORSED DIPLOMA

As required by the general assembly, the State Board adopted [PWR Diploma Endorsement](#) criteria “to offer students an incentive and a stamp of readiness”; and criteria for an endorsement “that would indicate extraordinary academic achievement or exemplary demonstration by a student of postsecondary and workforce readiness.”<sup>64</sup>

The minimum level of postsecondary and workforce readiness called for in the criteria must reflect the expectations for postsecondary and workforce readiness that are applied nationally and internationally.

### DIPLOMA ENDORSEMENT IN STEM

A local education provider may grant a diploma endorsement in STEM to a graduating high school student who demonstrates mastery in the STEM disciplines. The following are options the student might use to demonstrate mastery:

- ➔ Successfully complete, with a grade point average of at least 3.5 on a 4.0 scale or the equivalent for a higher scale, a coherent sequence of at least four courses in the areas of science, technology, engineering, and mathematics as determined by the granting local education provider, which courses are in addition to the minimum graduation requirements in these areas;
- ➔ Demonstrate proficiency in mathematics by achieving a minimum established score on one of several assessments specified in statute;
- ➔ Successfully complete a final capstone project by achieving a high proficiency level of mastery, as set by the LEP, for each of a set of competencies specified in statute, including inquiry-based learning, creative problem-solving, and critical thinking.<sup>65</sup>

64 [C.R.S. 22-7-1009 Diploma endorsements - adoption - revisions](#); [C.R.S. 22-7-1017 High school diploma - endorsement - effect](#); Colorado Department of Education. [PWR Diploma Endorsement](#)

65 [C.R.S. 22-7-1009.3 Diploma endorsement - science, technology, engineering, and mathematics - definitions](#)

## DIPLOMA ENDORSEMENT IN BILITERACY

A local education provider may grant a diploma endorsement in biliteracy to a graduating high school student who attains proficiency or higher in one or more world languages in addition to attaining proficiency or higher in English. The following are options a student might use to demonstrate proficiency:

- Passing a world language advanced placement test with a score of three or higher or passing the world language portion of an international baccalaureate test with a score of four or higher;
- Successfully completing a four-year high school course of study in the world language and attaining an overall grade point average of at least 3.0 in the course of study;
- Achieving a passing score on the world language portion of a nationally recognized test that is relied upon by institutions of higher education.<sup>66</sup>

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- Consider diploma endorsement options based on information provided by the district/school
- Include one or more diploma endorsement in the ICAP

#### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- Establish minimum proficiency levels that a student must demonstrate from among options specified. LEPs are required to work with STEM-related business and industry leaders in establishing high proficiency levels of mastery for a STEM endorsement
- Make determinations of student proficiency from among specified options

### RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-7-1009 Diploma endorsements - adoption - revisions](#)

[C.R.S. 22-7-1017 High school diploma - endorsement - effect](#)

[CDE. Postsecondary and Workforce Readiness \(PWR\) High School Diploma Endorsement Criteria](#)

[CDE. PWR Diploma Endorsement](#)

## Additional Expanded Opportunities for High School Students

Other options available to students in high school include the opportunity to participate in concurrent enrollment and early college courses, the ASCENT program, and P-Tech programs, as well as internships and other work-based learning opportunities. These options are discussed in further detail in the “Expanded Learning Opportunities” section, below.

<sup>66</sup> [C.R.S. 22-7-1009.5 Diploma endorsement - biliteracy - definitions](#)



## V. Expanded Opportunities for Learning

Students across the state have a number of opportunities — beyond traditional school-based courses — to broaden their access to programs, such as through blended and online program participation, options for earning college credit while in high school, and, in a number of districts, the option to participate in high-quality, innovative learning experiences outside of the classroom.

### Blended and Online Education Programs

*“Online education represents a twenty-first century approach to teaching and learning that is appropriate for today’s students... Technology and online education, including both full-time and supplemental programs, are important tools to enhance educational opportunities and improve educational outcomes”* [C.R.S. § 22-30.7-101. Legislative Declaration](#)

Thanks to strong action by state leaders, including a focus on program quality and access, public school students may elect to participate in blended and online learning opportunities, in lieu of or in addition to instruction provided on campus.

- CDE, pursuant to State Board rules, has established a process for the operation of online or virtual programs, designed and operated in alignment with quality standards, and provides tools and resources for online schools, as well as hybrid learning, blended learning, remote learning supports and technology, and college level online courses.<sup>67</sup> School districts and other entities may create or oversee multi-district online schools.<sup>68</sup>
- A Blended Learning Initiative has been created to review blended and online learning models currently being used by districts in the state. This initiative focuses on those districts implementing learning models that are outside of the guidance related to blended learning and supplemental online courses. Schools in this group may receive a two-year formal variance waiver to the guidance.<sup>69</sup>
- Supplemental online education courses must be provided to school districts in the state at affordable costs and each high school student may take at least one supplemental online course per year.<sup>70</sup> Students have the option of using the statewide supplemental online and blended learning program (known as Colorado Empowered Learning) to access supplemental online courses at a subsidized cost.<sup>71</sup>

67 [1 CCR 301-71 Rules for the Administration, Certification and Oversight of Colorado Online Program](#)

68 [C.R.S. 22-30.7-105 Program criteria - guidelines - quality standards - records - rules](#)

69 [Colorado Department of Education. Blended Learning Initiative \(BLI\)](#)

70 [C.R.S. 22-5-119 Statewide supplemental online and blended learning program - contract - legislative declaration - definitions](#)

71 [Colorado Department of Education. Guidance for Districts & Schools Using Colorado Empowered Learning](#)

## ST. VRAIN VALLEY SCHOOLS

The St. Vrain Valley Schools have “created an environment where its teachers are leading the districtwide transition to a blended learning model, one that integrates technology with high-quality instruction to drive student outcomes.” St. Vrain Valley Schools began with a blended learning 3-year plan in 2018. The schools assembled 8 teachers who were interested in the work and allowed them to work and create together, ultimately creating the Blended Collaborative. The second year saw 28 teacher participants and by the third year, 42 teachers were involved. Currently, there are 95 teacher participants. The schools provided additional supports and incentives to encourage this movement, through a support team that helped to plan the online modules, set agendas for all meetings, and provide support to educators with observations, feedback, and planning. The schools used the state-supported professional development to deliver professional development virtually to educators and coaching video tools to allow teachers to look into other teachers’ classrooms virtually. Through a survey, the schools found the following impacts in the classrooms — students are:

- Becoming more active learners
- Taking more ownership of their learning
- Engaged in critical thinking
- Partaking in more collaborative and academic conversations
- Exploring real world applications

[Colorado Empowered Learning. Taking a Grassroots Approach to Implementing Blended & Personalized Learning](#)

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Participation in blended and online education programs, including the Colorado Empowered Learning program, and enrollment in multi-district online school
- ➔ Support for incorporating blended and online programs into the ICAP

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Locally-designed programs and instruction
- ➔ Access to state-offered supplemental online education courses
- ➔ Opportunity to create multi-district online school
- ➔ Possible waiver of state statute or regulations

## RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-30.7-101, et al. Online Education Programs](#)

[C.R.S. 22-5-119 Statewide supplemental online and blended learning program - contract - legislative declaration - definitions](#)

[CDE. Online and Blended Learning Resources](#)

[CDE. Blended Learning Initiative \(BLI\)](#)

[CDE. Guidance for Districts & Schools Using Colorado Empowered Learning](#)

[Colorado Expanded Learning. Case Studies](#)

# Options for Earning College Credit in High School

State leaders have created numerous opportunities for students to earn college credit while they are in high school. CDE makes information on the following options available to all in order to encourage student participation, and to improve options and access.

## CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT PROGRAMS

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The Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act<sup>72</sup> defines “concurrent enrollment” to mean the “*simultaneous enrollment of a qualified student in a local education provider and in one or more postsecondary courses, including academic or career and technical education courses, which may include course work related to apprenticeship programs or internship programs, at an institution of higher education...at no tuition cost to the qualified student or the qualified student’s parent or legal guardian*” with limited exceptions.<sup>73</sup>

A student who successfully completes a concurrent enrollment postsecondary course is required to receive credit toward high school graduation requirements, and one of the following:

- ➔ postsecondary credit that applies toward completion of developmental education courses;
- ➔ postsecondary credit that applies toward earning a certificate or degree awarded through an approved postsecondary career and technical education program;
- ➔ is approved by the department of higher education for transfer from a two-year institution to a four-year institution in satisfaction of prerequisite courses for a specific major; or
- ➔ is approved for statewide transfer or is part of a statewide degree transfer agreement, as provided for in Colorado Revised Statutes (C.R.S. 23-1-125 and 23-1-108 (7)(a)).

The Act expands the mission of concurrent enrollment programs to serve a wider range of students, particularly those who represent communities with historically low college participation rates, such that all of the state’s high schools eventually develop equitable access to concurrent enrollment programs. To support this mission, the Act made it permissible for state education funds to be used for concurrent enrollment programs.

Under State Board rules:<sup>74</sup>

- ➔ A standard concurrent enrollment application form shall include, but need not be limited to, the following:
  - A list of all the courses in which the qualified student intends to enroll, including the number of academic credit hours the qualified student would receive from the institution of higher education upon successful completion of each course;
  - Confirmation of the number of credits for which the LEP agrees to pay;
  - Verification of, among other things, that each course is consistent with the qualified student’s Individual Career and Academic Plan (ICAP); the qualified student meets the same prerequisites as students enrolled in the institution of higher education; and each course satisfies postsecondary education degree, certificate, or developmental education requirements at the institution of higher education.
- ➔ A student is required to establish, in consultation with the administration of his or her LEP, an academic plan of study that describes all of the courses that the student intends to complete to satisfy his or her remaining requirements for graduation from the LEP. The LEP must approve the plan of study before a student participates in concurrent enrollment.

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72 C.R.S. 22-35-101, et al. Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act

73 C.R.S. 22-35-103 Definitions

74 1 CCR 301-86 Rules for the Administration of the Concurrent Enrollment Program

## ACCELERATING STUDENTS THROUGH CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT (ASCENT) PROGRAM

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CDE administers the [Accelerating Students Through Concurrent Enrollment \(ASCENT\) program](#),<sup>75</sup> as required by Colorado Revised Statutes and in accordance with State Board guidelines. The objectives of the ASCENT program are to:

- ➔ Increase the percentage of students who participate in postsecondary education, especially among low-income and traditionally underserved populations;
- ➔ Decrease the number of students who do not complete high school;
- ➔ Decrease the amount of time that is required for a student to complete a postsecondary degree or certificate;
- ➔ Reduce state expenditures for public education; and
- ➔ Increase the number of educational pathways available to students.

Under the program, a qualified student may concurrently enroll in postsecondary courses, including academic courses and career and technical education courses, in the year directly following the year in which he or she was enrolled in the twelfth grade of a local education provider.

The local education provider of an ASCENT program participant may include the student in the district's funded pupil count and may expend the related funding on behalf of the student who is enrolled in an institution of higher education.

## CONCURRENT ENROLLMENT EXPANSION AND INNOVATION GRANT PROGRAM

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The [Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant Program](#),<sup>76</sup> authorized by the general assembly and administered by CDE, is designed to provide grants to partnering LEPs and institutions of higher education that seek to begin offering, or to expand their capacity to offer, concurrent enrollment opportunities to qualified students.

A partnership, which may include multiple LEPs and multiple institutions of higher education, may apply for a grant in accordance with rules of the State Board. An application must include, among other information, a description of the manner in which the partnership plans to use the grant money to expand the number of qualified students concurrently enrolled in postsecondary courses.

Grants are to be awarded to partnerships that:

- ➔ Do not provide concurrent enrollment or concurrently enroll few qualified students at the time of application;
- ➔ Demonstrate the greatest degree of need for financial support to expand concurrent enrollment, including needs that may arise as a result of a higher-than-anticipated participation rate;
- ➔ Demonstrate the most effective use of the grant money to provide the greatest expansion of concurrent enrollment, which may include expanding by using technological strategies or partnering with the statewide supplemental online and blended learning program described in Colorado Revised Statutes section 22-5-119 and must include expanding the participation of low-income or first-generation qualified students in concurrent enrollment;
- ➔ Have demonstrated success in providing concurrent enrollment to a large percentage of the qualified students enrolled by the LEPs and are seeking to implement innovations to expand the number of qualified students concurrently enrolled; or
- ➔ Have a plan in place to ensure that coursework related to apprenticeship programs and internship programs are eligible to receive transferable postsecondary course credits.

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<sup>75</sup> [C.R.S. 22-35-108 Accelerating students through concurrent enrollment program - objectives - non-tuition expenses - rules](#)

<sup>76</sup> [C.R.S. 22-35-114 Concurrent enrollment expansion and innovation grant program - created - report - rules - legislative declaration - repeal](#)

## EARLY COLLEGE

A state-designed early college, authorized by the general assembly, is a secondary school that requires each student to enroll in and complete secondary and postsecondary courses, such that upon successful completion of the school's curriculum, the student will have completed the requirements of both a high school diploma and an associate's degree or other postsecondary credential or at least sixty credits toward the completion of a postsecondary credential.<sup>77</sup>

One early college option available to students in Colorado is [Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools](#),<sup>78</sup> or P-Tech schools. These schools are operated collaboratively, through efforts of LEPs, community colleges, and high-growth industry employers. These programs are "informed by current and projected industry standards and focused on science, technology, engineering, and mathematics with mentoring, job shadowing, internships, pre-apprenticeships, training, and other workplace education experiences." These schools are required to satisfy all state assessment and accountability requirements; however, P-Tech schools may establish additional indicators for success, including the ability of students to obtain employment after graduation or pursue postsecondary education opportunities, as well as "any relevant performance indicators established for the concurrent enrollment, ASCENT, and TREP programs."<sup>79</sup>

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Participation in courses/programs specifically designed to offer postsecondary credit
- ➔ Support for incorporating college credit courses into the ICAP

#### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Locally-designed programs, partnerships, and instruction
- ➔ Possible waiver of state statute or regulations

### RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-35-101, et al. Concurrent Enrollment Programs Act](#)

[C.R.S. 22-35-114 Concurrent enrollment expansion and innovation grant program - created - report - rules - legislative declaration - repeal](#)

[1 CCR 301-107 Rules for the Administration of the Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation Grant Program](#)

[1 CCR 301-105 Rules for the review of Early College Designations](#)

[CDE. Frequently Asked Questions \(FAQs\) - Early College High School](#)

[CDE. Options for Earning College Credit in High School - Early College High School](#)

[CDE. Options for Earning College Credit in High School. Videos from Students, Counselors and Parents About Concurrent Enrollment](#)

[CDE. P-TECH - Early College Comparison Chart \(updated January 2021\)](#)

<sup>77</sup> [C.R.S. 22-35-103\(10\)\(a\) Definitions: Early College](#)

<sup>78</sup> [C.R.S. 22-35.3-101, et al. Pathways in Technology Early College High Schools](#)

<sup>79</sup> [C.R.S. 22-35.3-103 Pathways in technology early college high schools - design - requirements - approval](#)

# Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot (ILOP) Program

Colorado allows students to enroll in public schools part-time, up to 90 hours out of 360 instructional hours per semester. For funding purposes, districts may receive 50% funding for students enrolled in part-time courses. Districts may also count homeschool students for purposes of determining pupil enrollment, so long as the student is enrolled in a nonpublic home-based educational program, while also attending a public school for a portion of the day.<sup>80</sup>

The [Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot \(ILOP\) Program](#)<sup>81</sup> ensures full-time per pupil funding for students in grades nine through twelve who participate in learning experiences outside of the classroom. These experiences include, but are not limited to:

- ➔ Apprenticeships
- ➔ Residency programs
- ➔ Enrollment in postsecondary courses taught on college campuses
- ➔ Competency-based learning or capstone projects
- ➔ Other learning experiences “*designed to help students develop and demonstrate personal, entrepreneurial, civic and interpersonal, and professional skills*”

A school seeking to participate in the pilot must apply and provide a description of the Innovative Learning Plan (ILP) that it expects to implement, including an explanation of how it aligns with at least two principles for student learning and transition specified by the Education Leadership Council and why those principles were selected; or an explanation of how it meets the Research-Based Design Principle. As described by CDE, an ILP is an LEP’s or group of LEP’s plan to provide a variety of innovative learning opportunities to students enrolled in grades nine through twelve.

The State Board’s selection of pilot participants is based on a determination that the ILP:

- ➔ Is likely to result in meaningful innovative learning opportunities that will significantly support students in their transition from high school to postsecondary education or the workforce; and
- ➔ Aligns with at least two of the principles for student learning and transition specified by the Education Leadership Council, or meets the research-based design principles.<sup>82</sup>

The state’s goal is to increase the number of LEPs participating in the program to 100% by 2025-26.<sup>83</sup>

Legislation adopted during the 2021 legislative session, allows schools of districts to participate in an ILOP with a district or independently. All applicants are required to demonstrate how their ILP disproportionately benefits underserved students.<sup>84</sup>

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Participation in courses/programs specifically designed to offer postsecondary credit
- ➔ Support for innovative learning opportunities in the ICAP

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Locally-designed Innovative Learning Plan detailing programs, partnerships, and instruction
- ➔ Possible waiver of state statute or regulations

80 [C.R.S. 22-33-104.5 Home-based education - legislative declaration - definitions - guidelines](#); Colorado Department of Education. [Home School Law](#)

81 [C.R.S. 22-35.6-101, et al. High School Innovative Learning Pilot Program](#)

82 Colorado Department of Education. [Innovative Learning Pilot Program C.R.S. 22-35.6-101 thru 107 - State Guidelines](#)

83 Colorado Department of Education. [Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot Program \(ILOP\)](#)

84 [Senate Bill 21-106](#). Colorado General Assembly (2021)

## RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-35.6-101, et al. High School Innovative Learning Pilot Program](#)

[1 CCR 301-110 Rules for the Administration of the High School Innovative Learning Pilot Program](#)

[Senate Bill 21-106 Concerning Successful High School Transitions. Colorado General Assembly \(2021\)](#)

[CDE. Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot Program \(ILOP\)](#)

[CDE. Innovative Learning Opportunity Pilot Program 2021-2022 \(Handout\)](#)

[CDE. Innovative Learning Pilot Program C.R.S. 22-35.6-101 thru 107 - State Guidelines](#)



## VI. Choice of Programs and Schools

Students throughout the state, as well as those coming into the state due to a parent’s active-duty military assignment, may take advantage of state statutes and regulations, and in accordance with locally-developed policies and procedures, that allow application for open enrollment in programs and schools other than those to which the student is assigned.

### Public Schools of Choice

The Colorado Revised Statutes establishing requirements regarding Public Schools of Choice, specifically Choice of Programs and Schools Within School Districts, and Contractual Education, allow some flexibility for districts and schools.

#### **CHOICE OF PROGRAMS AND SCHOOLS WITHIN SCHOOL DISTRICTS**

Every school district is required to adopt policies and procedures for allowing a pupil to apply for enrollment in the programs or schools operated within the district; however, the district is not required to alter the structure of a school, establish and offer any particular program not currently offered, or alter or waive existing program eligibility criteria. Nonresident pupils (those living within other school districts in the state) who apply under the district’s policies and procedures are not required to pay nonresident tuition.

In developing policies and procedures for the application of pupils for enrollment in the district’s programs or schools, the district may give priority to certain pupils and is limited in its ability to deny enrollment - generally limited to the availability of seats and at times, certain requirements for specific programs. Schools and districts have some flexibility:

- ➔ **Prioritizing Enrollment for Certain Students.** In adopting policy governing Choice of Programs and Schools Within School Districts, a board should consider giving priority to *“an applicant with a proficiency rating of unsatisfactory in one or more academic areas who attends a public school that is required to implement a turnaround plan pursuant to section 22-11-406 or that is subject to restructuring pursuant to section 22-11-210”*.<sup>85</sup> Under House Bill 22-1294, charter schools also are now allowed to provide an enrollment priority for students with disabilities to ensure greater access to school choice for students with disabilities.<sup>86</sup>

85 [C.R.S. 22-36-101\(2\) Choice of programs and schools within school districts](#)

86 [House Bill 22-1294. Colorado Legislature \(2022\)](#)

## CHARTER SCHOOLS

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Charter schools, established through contracts with authorizers in the state, provide another opportunity for students. Through the CDE, charter schools may apply for the Colorado Charter School Startup and Implementation grant,<sup>87</sup> receive technical assistance, and apply for waivers. Waivers are available to charter schools to ensure that these schools have needed flexibility to operate under the charter school's educational plan. All requests for waivers must meet the requirements in the Charter School Act.<sup>88</sup> The State Board is required to establish a list of automatic waivers that are available to all charter schools. The list of automatic waivers may not include waivers concerning:

- ➔ the employment of, and performance evaluation system for, licensed personnel;
- ➔ procedures for competitive bidding in the purchase of goods and services, except professional services;
- ➔ annual school calendar and teacher-pupil contact hours; and
- ➔ the power to accept and expend gifts, donations, or grants.<sup>89</sup>

The Colorado Department of Education keeps an updated list of automatic waivers on the CDE website.<sup>90</sup>

Further, school districts, on behalf of charter schools, may also apply to the State Board for other waivers of law or rules, with some exceptions relating to accountability, assessments, student safety, among others.<sup>91</sup>

Any request for a waiver must be included in the contract between the charter school and chartering local board of education. Within 10 days after the contract is approved by the local board of education, the local board must request the waivers through the State Board. The State Board then has 45 days to grant or deny the request. If no response is received, the requests for waivers are deemed granted.<sup>92</sup>

### CIVA CHARTER HIGH SCHOOL

Once known as an “alternative” high school, CIVA (Character, Integrity, Vision, and the Arts) Charter High School in Colorado Springs has recently become known as a rigorous, college prep high school and a highly celebrated fine arts program. Most lessons at the school are taught in 15 minute blocks, with teachers using visual, auditory, and kinesthetic approaches to instruction. The use of Quantum Learning, a brain-based approach to education, includes a strong focus on classroom and school culture. Last year, 100% of CIVA students gained acceptance into 4-year colleges. [Colorado Department of Education. Colorado's Stories of Promising Practices. Stories of Promising Practice: CIVA Charter High School](#)

## SCHOOL ENROLLMENT FOR INBOUND ACTIVE DUTY MILITARY FAMILIES

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To make school choice enrollment more accessible for active duty military families, every school district and charter school must permit an inbound active duty military member to submit an application for enrollment (or open enrollment) by electronic means and to register their child remotely, without the need for physical presence. If desired, for purposes of enrollment, an inbound family may use the school liaison office address for the military installation to which the inbound active duty military member is or will be assigned. In addition:

- ➔ Any open enrolled child of an inbound active duty military member is guaranteed automatic matriculation so long as the child remains in the school (including a charter school), program, or district.
- ➔ Younger siblings of an enrolled child are to be given priority preference for enrollment in subsequent school years.

Through the CDE Schools of Choice Unit, the state provides resources and guidance to parents and students on charter schools, home schools, and other relevant school choice guidance.<sup>93</sup>

87 Colorado Department of Education. [Colorado Charter Schools Program \(CCSP\)](#)

88 C.R.S. 22-30.5-101, et al. Charter Schools Act

89 C.R.S. 22-30.5-104 Charter school - requirements - authority - rules - definitions

90 Colorado Department of Education. [Waivers & Policy Guidance - Automatic Waivers](#)

91 C.R.S. 22-30.5-104(6)(c) Charter school - requirements - authority - rules - definitions

92 C.R.S. 22-30.5-105 Charter schools - contract contents - regulations

93 Colorado Department of Education. [Schools of Choice Unit](#)

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [C.R.S. 22-30.5-101, et al. Charter Schools Act](#)
- [C.R.S. 22-36-101, et al. Public Schools of Choice](#)
- [C.R.S. 22-36-107 Inbound active duty military families - school enrollment - registration - legislative declaration - definitions](#)
- [C.R.S. 22-54-109 Attendance in district other than district of residence](#)
- [1 CCR 301-39 Rules for the Administration of the Public School Finance Act of 1994](#)
- [CDE. 2022 Student October Count Audit Resource Guide - Fiscal Year 2022-2023](#)
- [CDE. Charter School Waiver Request Guidance](#)
- [CDE. Colorado Charter Schools](#)
- [CDE. Colorado's Stories of Promising Practices](#)
- [CDE. Schools of Choice Unit](#)
- [Ready CO. Open Doors, Open Districts: School Choice in Colorado's Traditional Public Schools \(2018\)](#)

## CONTRACTUAL EDUCATION

As authorized in Colorado Revised Statutes, and described by CDE, Contractual Education students are “those students for whom a district is paying tuition to another district or third-party entity...Tuition is defined as money paid to cover the student’s basic educational services.” Contractual Education providers include, but are not limited to, another Colorado public school district, a BOCES, and a state or private facility. Contractual Education does not include students placed by a state agency in a facility to which the district (in which the student is resident) is required to pay costs above the amount the facility receives from the state agency as tuition for providing educational services.<sup>94</sup>

- ➔ **State Funding Eligibility for the Home District.** A district paying tuition for educational services at a non-district location, is entitled to submit the student for funding in its Student October Count data submission, subject to production of all necessary documentation from the educational provider evidencing the student has met all funding requirements.
- ➔ **Student Data Count Eligibility for District Providing Contractual Education.** A district receiving tuition for providing educational services for an out-of-district student, whether tuition is paid by the district of residence, the student’s parent/guardian, or any other entity, may include the student in its Student October Count data submission; however, the district cannot submit the student for funding.<sup>95</sup>

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Opportunities to provide input regarding locally-developed policies and procedures
- ➔ Opportunities for enrollment in the program(s) or school that best meets the needs of the student

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Locally developed policies/procedures and, in some instances, preferences
- ➔ Possible waiver of state statute or regulations

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [C.R.S. 22-54-109 Attendance in district other than district of residence](#)
- [CDE. 2022 Student October Count Audit Resource Guide - Fiscal Year 2022-2023](#)

<sup>94</sup> Colorado Department of Education. [2022 Student October Count Audit Resource Guide - Fiscal Year 2022-2023](#)

<sup>95</sup> Colorado Department of Education. [2022 Student October Count Audit Resource Guide - Fiscal Year 2022-2023](#)



## VII. Other Flexibility and Support for Innovation

Beyond the flexibility, choices, and opportunities described in the previous sections, local boards, as well as district and school leaders, may take advantage of additional flexibility and support provided by the state, including opportunities to request a waiver of state statute or rules, and to participate in innovation-centered pilots and programs.

### State Board General Waivers

#### STATE BOARD GENERAL WAIVERS OF STATUTE AND RULES

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One important aspect of the state’s flexibility for innovative, student-centered instruction is the general assembly’s authorization of State Board waivers. Pursuant to the Colorado Revised Statutes, the State Board is to grant a waiver request that meets two criteria:

- The requested flexibility, if granted, will enhance educational opportunity and quality within the school district; and
- The costs to the school district of complying with the requirements for which the waiver is requested significantly limit educational opportunity within the school district.<sup>96</sup>

With some exceptions enumerated in State Board rules,<sup>97</sup> a waiver may be granted of any requirement of Title 22 of the Colorado Revised Code or requirements established by State Board rules.

Note: Pursuant to State Board rules, there is a list of statutes that are automatically waived for all charter schools. The State Board is to grant additional non-automatic waivers of state statutory requirements or rules to charter schools when it deems such waivers necessary.

**SIGNIFICANT RESTRICTION**  
A district or school must “specify the manner in which [the innovation schools] shall comply with the intent of the waived statutes or rules and shall be accountable to the state for such compliance.”

96 [C.R.S. 22-2-117 Additional power - state board - waiver of requirements - rules](#)

97 [1 CCR 301-35 Rules for the Administration of the Waiver of Statute and Rule](#)

## WAIVER REQUEST PROCESS

- ➔ The local board, in a properly noticed public meeting and hearing, must adopt a resolution stating the board's intent to apply for a waiver and specifying the statutes and rules for which the board will request waivers.
- ➔ At least sixty days prior to such public meeting and hearing, the local board must meet and consult with the school district accountability committee concerning the intent to seek the waiver(s).
- ➔ A written waiver request is to be electronically submitted to the State Board. The submission must include:
  - A list of statutes and/or rules requested for waiver;
  - A statement explaining how the waiver would enhance educational opportunity and quality within the school district;
  - A statement explaining how costs to the school district of complying with the requirement for which the waiver is requested significantly limit educational opportunity within the school district;
  - A statement describing the manner in which the school district shall comply with the intent of the waived rules or statutes as well as how it shall be accountable to the State Board for such compliance;
  - Documentation of legal requirements for district's public hearing process; and
  - A school district of 3,000 or more pupils shall provide signatures demonstrating that its application has the consent of a majority of the appropriate accountability committee, a majority of the affected licensed administrators, and a majority of the affected school district teachers and shall indicate how the affected staff and committee were determined.

Any such waiver granted by the State Board will continue in effect indefinitely, unless the local board that holds the waiver by resolution requests revocation of the waiver; or the State Board receives evidence that constitutes good and just cause for revocation of the waiver, as determined by the State Board.

In many instances, through collaboration with CDE staff, districts and schools determine that sufficient flexibility already exists within state requirements. Where a waiver is needed, CDE assists applicants in submitting requests to the SBE for approval.

## OPPORTUNITIES

### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Provide input on local request for flexibility

### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Identify barriers to innovation and request flexibility

## RELATED RESOURCES

- [C.R.S. 22-2-117 Additional power - state board - waiver of requirements - rules](#)
- [1 CCR 301-35 Rules for the Administration of the Waiver of Statute and Rule](#)
- [CDE. Comparison of Waiver Laws](#)

# Innovation Designations and Related Waiver Opportunities

For purposes which include giving districts and schools “*greater ability to meet the educational needs of a diverse and constantly changing student population*” and encouraging them “*to create and manage a portfolio of schools that meet a variety of education needs, including...[through] a vertically integrated innovation zone of schools*”; the general assembly authorized the designation of Innovation Schools, Innovation School Zones (within school districts), and Districts of Innovation.<sup>98</sup>

## THREE INNOVATION DESIGNATIONS

- District of innovation means a school district that is designated as a district of innovation pursuant to [Colorado Revised Statute section 22-32.5-107](#).
- Innovation School means a school in which a local school board implements an innovation plan pursuant to [Colorado Revised Statute section 22-32.5-104](#).
- Innovation School Zone means a group of schools of a school district that share common interests, such as geographical location or educational focus, or that sequentially serve classes of students as they progress through elementary and secondary education and in which a local school board implements a plan for creating an innovation school zone pursuant to [Colorado Revised Statute section 22-32.5-104](#).

## DESIGNATION PROCESS OVERVIEW

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The process schools and districts go through to achieve designation (as an Innovation School or Innovation School Zone) are similar; however, as described below, there are a few process steps and requirements unique to each:

- ➔ A school begins the process of becoming an Innovation School by developing an Innovation Plan and submitting it to its local school board.
- ➔ A group of public schools of a school district (which may include all of the public schools within a district) that “*share common interests, such as geographical location or educational focus, or that sequentially serve classes of students as they progress through elementary and secondary education*” may jointly create a Plan for Creating an Innovation School Zone and submit it to their local school board.
- ➔ The development of either type of plan — Innovation Plan or Plan to Create an Innovation School Zone — may be initiated by a local board and developed by the board in collaboration with one or more schools. In doing so, the board must give each school that would be affected by the plan an opportunity to participate in creation of the plan.
- ➔ The local school board must review and either approve or disapprove the Innovation Plan or Plan for Creating an Innovation School Zone within 60 days after receiving the plan. A decision to reject a plan must include a written explanation of the basis for its decision, along with an opportunity for resubmission, at any time, of an amended plan.
- ➔ After a local school board has approved a plan, it may proceed to seek State Board designation of the school district as a District of Innovation by submitting one or more Innovation Plans or Plans for Creating an Innovation School Zone for review and comment by the Commissioner of Education and the State Board. Such comments, including any suggested changes or additions, are to be provided within sixty days of plan receipt, after which the State Board is to designate the district as a District of Innovation if the Board concludes that the plan:
  - Is likely to enhance educational opportunity, standards, and quality within the innovation schools or innovation school zones; and
  - Is fiscally feasible.
- ➔ Following any denial of a request for district designation, the local school board may submit, at any time, an amended plan.

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<sup>98</sup> C.R.S. 22-32.5-101, et al. [Innovation Schools and Innovation School Zones Within School Districts](#)

## PLAN REQUIREMENTS AND WAIVER REQUESTS

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An **Innovation Plan** must include the following:

- ➔ A statement of the public school’s mission and why designation as an Innovation School would enhance the school’s ability to achieve its mission;
- ➔ A description of the innovations the school proposed to implement;
  - A plan might specify, for example, innovations in school staffing; curriculum and assessment; class scheduling; use of financial and other resources; faculty recruitment, employment, evaluation, and compensation; whether the school will operate as a community school; and implementation of transformational school strategies such as shared leadership, culturally relevant curriculum, student and family supports, positive discipline practices, and family and community engagement.
- ➔ A listing of the school’s programs, policies, or operational documents that would be affected by the innovations and the manner in which they would be affected;
- ➔ The expected improvements in academic performance;
- ➔ An estimate of any anticipated cost savings and increased efficiencies;
- ➔ Evidence that a majority of the administrators employed at the public school, a majority of the teachers employed at the public school, and a majority of the school accountability committee for the public school consent to designation as an innovation school [Note: A local school board may approve an Innovation Plan for a new school that has not previously opened as a non-innovation school and has yet to hire teachers];
- ➔ A description of any statutory sections included in Title 22 (Colorado Revised Statutes) or any regulatory or district policy requirements that would need to be waived for the school to implement its identified innovations, as well as any provision of the collective bargaining agreement that would need to be waived for plan implementation.

### WHAT IS A COMMUNITY SCHOOL?

As defined in statute, a Community School is a public school that implements the following:

- an annual asset and needs assessment that engages families, students, and educators in the community;
- a strategic plan that includes the creation of problem solving teams;
- a process to engage partners who bring assets and expertise to implement the school’s goals;
- a community school coordinator who is a staff member at the community school site.

#### C.R.S. 22-32.5-103 (1.5)

In 2022, the general assembly authorized the CDE, through a state review panel, to recommend that a district public school be converted to a community school if the district public school fails to make substantial progress under its turnaround plan. CDE supports community schools as an evidence-based strategy for school improvement, with resources and support designed to address the three essential components of a community school:

- Strategic Plan
- Community School Coordinator
- Alignment of the Four Pillars of Community Schools
  - Integrated Student Supports
  - Expanded and Enriched Learning Time and Opportunities
  - Active Family and Community Engagement
  - Collaborative Leadership and Practices

#### Senate Bill 22-054. Colorado Legislature (2022)

See CDE — Community Schools for additional information.

A **Plan for Creating an Innovation School Zone** must include the information described above for each school that would be in the Zone, plus additional information including the following:

- ➔ A description of how innovations in the public schools in the school innovation zone would be integrated to achieve results that would be less likely to be accomplished by each public school working alone; and
- ➔ An estimate of any economies of scale that would be achieved by innovations implemented jointly by the public schools within the innovation school zone.

## WAIVER OF STATE STATUTES OR RULES

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Upon designation of a District of Innovation, the State Board is to waive any statutes or rules specified in the district's innovation plan, except that some statutes are not permitted to be waived, as provided in section 22-32.5-108 of the Colorado Revised Statutes.<sup>99</sup>

Districts of Innovation may be granted the same waivers that are automatically granted to charter schools in the state. (*See CDE. Automatic Waivers*)

### SIGNIFICANT RESTRICTION

A District of Innovation that receives a waiver must “*specify the manner in which [the innovation schools] shall comply with the intent of the waived statutes or rules and shall be accountable to the state for such compliance.*”

Additional waivers may be requested, or existing waivers modified, in response to any revisions a District of Innovation makes to an Innovation Plan. With limited exceptions, any such waiver granted will continue in effect as long as the public school that initiated the request continues to be designated as an Innovation School or is included in an Innovation School Zone.

## LOCAL SCHOOL BOARD REVIEW FOLLOWING DESIGNATION

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Three years after a District of Innovation's local school board approves an Innovation Plan or Plan for Creating an Innovation School Zone, and every three years thereafter, the local board is required to conduct a review of school performance to determine if the school or zone is achieving or making adequate progress toward the academic performance improvements specified in the plan.

Colorado currently has 107 Innovation Schools within 17 Districts of Innovation. They serve 5.4% of the state's overall PK-12 student population.

- 10 Innovation School Zones are made up of 43 Innovation Schools that operate within 8 Districts of Innovation

The most commonly requested waivers tend to be related to the following:

- **Time.** The most common set of waivers requested are those related to time. An innovation school often requests the authority to make decisions about when the school will operate, as long as the school continues to meet statutory minimum requirements related to pupil-teacher contact hours and school calendar days.
- **Personnel.** The next most common set of waivers are those related to personnel. Among all innovation schools, the ability for an innovation school to employ staff with flexibility on credentials, create its personnel evaluation system, set its salary schedule, draft its employee agreements, and prohibit teacher transfer are the highest requested personnel waivers.
- **Budget.** Many innovation schools request waivers from district budgetary policies. Through such waivers, the district delegates more authority to oversee school budgets to the school or zone level. In turn, the innovation school is permitted to make more budget decisions at the local level and align its spending with the school's specific initiatives.

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99 [C.R.S. 22-32.5-108 District of innovation - waiver of statutory and regulatory requirements](#)

## ALTERNATIVE GOVERNANCE STRUCTURES FOR INNOVATION SCHOOL ZONES

In 2022, the general assembly authorized the use of alternative governance structures within Innovation School Zones. This permits a local board of education to delegate management activities of schools within the Innovation Zone to another organization and the organization enters into a partnership with the local school board. A dispute resolution process must be used to resolve any disagreements that may arise between local school boards and innovation zones with alternative governance structures.

The State Board recently released guidance on the Innovation School Zones with alternative governance structures and approved procedures for State Board review:

- ➔ [Innovation Zones with Alternative Governance — Procedures for State Board Review and Comment on Local District Decisions](#)
- ➔ [Colorado State Board of Education. Administrative Procedures for Review of Local Board Decisions on Innovation School Zones with Alternative Governance](#)

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

- ➔ Provide input on local plan development and adoption of alternative governance structure
- ➔ Apply for student enrollment in Innovation School/Zone, using school choice flexibility

#### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

- ➔ Locally-developed plans
- ➔ Waiver opportunities
- ➔ Option to adopt an alternative governance structure

#### RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-32.5-101, et al. Innovation Schools and Innovation School Zones Within School Districts](#)

[Senate Bill 22-197 Innovation School Zones with Alternative Governance. Colorado General Assembly \(2022\)](#)

[CDE. Innovation Schools](#)

[CDE. 2022 Innovation Schools Annual Report](#)

[CDE. Innovation Schools Act Guidance \(2017\)](#)

[CDE. Innovation Plan Cover Page and Checklist \(2017\)](#)

[CDE. Comparison of Waiver Laws](#)

[CDE. Innovation School Waiver Requests](#)

## Local Accountability Systems — Grant Program

A local district may apply for participation in a CDE-administered program that allows the district to adopt local accountability systems to “*inform the continuous improvement of the state’s public school accountability system*” and provides grant funding to support such efforts.<sup>100</sup>

In 2019-2020, the first year of the program, 11 grants were awarded with 41 districts and individual schools participating. However, funding for year 2 was suspended due to state budget shortfalls related to the pandemic, but 10 of the 11 grantees continued work with 40 districts and individual schools participating. Funding was re-established for the 2021-22 year and funding for the current cohort was extended through the 2023-2024 school year. Applications will be accepted for a second cohort in spring 2024.<sup>101</sup>

### OPPORTUNITIES

#### FOR STUDENTS AND FAMILIES

➔ Provide input regarding a locally-designed accountability system

#### FOR DISTRICTS AND SCHOOLS

➔ Optional program participation with state support

### RELATED RESOURCES

[C.R.S. 22-11-701, et al. Local Accountability Systems](#)

[CDE. Local Accountability System Grant](#)

[CDE. Local Accountability System Info Sheet](#)

[CDE. Year 1 Legislative Report \(submitted 2021\)](#)

[CDE. Year 1 Extension Legislative Report \(submitted 2022\)](#)

[CDE. Year 2 Legislative Report \(submitted 2023\)](#)

<sup>100</sup> [C.R.S. 22-11-701, et al. Local Accountability Systems](#)

<sup>101</sup> Colorado Department of Education. [Local Accountability System Grant](#) (April 2023)



## VIII. Conclusion/Next Steps

Throughout this guide, we highlight many policies that schools and districts can leverage for flexibility. Many of the opportunities available also empower students to individualize their education, through support and resources. Whether a district or school decides to make major changes or start small, the Colorado Department of Education is here to help. Please contact Bill Kottenstette in the Schools of Choice unit at [kottenstette\\_b@cde.state.co.us](mailto:kottenstette_b@cde.state.co.us) or (303) 416-0372. For families or students seeking to personalize their own education, please reach out to your school or district for further information.

For further information, you can visit the Colorado Department of Education website, which includes links to the Department on social media where you can find updates on innovative opportunities for your student, school, or district at: <https://www.cde.state.co.us>.



[www.excelined.org](http://www.excelined.org)