

Aligning Business and Student Incentives

Ensuring Agility in Response to COVID-19



Students and families are facing unparalleled challenges because of COVID-19, and they are seeking responsiveness and innovation from education providers. More than ever, an agile education system that provides opportunity and access to all learners will be required to meet these needs. Over the previous months, multiple stakeholders—students, families, educators, administrators, researchers, and policymakers—graciously gave time and perspective to Colorado Succeeds to identify opportunities and challenges emerging from the pandemic that could inform future policy. All the policy advances suggested here may not be feasible in the 2021 legislative session, but they do provide opportunities to learn and evolve our education system in the short- and long-term to respond to the crisis and look toward the future.

This paper is one in a five-part series outlining policy ideas addressing education opportunities and challenges that have resulted from COVID-19. [The remaining papers include: Learn Everywhere, Reimagining High School, Emphasizing Equity, and Higher Education Innovation.](#)

While policies such as the Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot Program (ILOP), which releases high schools from seat time requirements in exchange for career and college innovation, and Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), which gives students work experience and an associate degree, make it easier for schools to offer work-based learning experiences to students, Colorado still does not have a robust network of companies that consistently make work-based learning opportunities available.

Through the Homegrown Talent Initiative, a statewide partnership between Colorado Succeeds and Colorado Education Initiative that supports communities as they build K-12 career-connected learning experiences, it has become apparent that when time is taken to engage and support employers in the co-design of graduate profiles and programs that offer meaningful returns to companies, communities can build sustainable work-based learning programs, even as they manage COVID-19.

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Colorado Succeeds has also seen that when employers open their doors to youth, they bring real value to their teams. Today’s youth are fluent with technology and connected to markets and networks in the way most adults are not. These contributions bring competitive advantages to product and process innovation, company culture, and the future workforce. However, companies who have not yet provided work-based learning experiences for youth assume that doing so is purely a public service, making employer incentives necessary to encourage company participation.

Key Questions

- ▶ How can small businesses bring youth in as both learners and assets to understaffed small businesses that help drive our economy?
- ▶ How can the state leverage its existing economic development incentives to encourage companies to offer opportunities for youth to learn?
- ▶ How much engagement does it take for an employer to find the long-term value in engaging with youth?
- ▶ How might additional incentives be provided for employers targeting youth that have been disengaged due to COVID-19, and who have had the least access to opportunity while in K-12?

Policy Ideas and Adaptations

The state's Office of Economic Development and International Trade (OEDIT) has several programs that attract companies to locate and expand in Colorado, like The Job Incentive Tax Credit. The governor also included a handful of small business recovery investments in his proposed budget. To double the impact of these investments, Colorado could require that companies, big and small, receiving public investment are also required to make some number of opportunities available to youth to engage in experiences along the career-connected learning continuum. Parameters could give additional funding, or additional competitive preferences, for targeting youth farthest from opportunity and having a school partner signed on at the time of application.

Conclusion

COVID-19 changed the way Coloradans do just about everything. Colorado Succeeds' Practice to Policy Feedback Loop Sessions brought together critical stakeholders—teachers and school and district leaders, policy experts, and students and families—to learn more about the needs of learners. The policy ideas discussed above are a response to needs and frustrations highlighted from these stakeholders. As the country and the world adapts and recovers from the impacts of COVID-19, education systems and policies must adapt to become more responsive to the needs of students and families. Education must do more to ensure that all students have access to meaningful and impactful programs and opportunities—no matter where they are learning.

About Colorado Succeeds

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Colorado Succeeds believes that great schools are good business. We are a movement of business leaders who are invested in improving schools, changing educational outcomes for kids, and shaping the future of Colorado's workforce. Together, we support the educators who are innovating in the classroom and the policymakers who are changing the system. Learn more at coloradosucceeds.org.

Questions?

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