



Emphasizing Equity

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, Aligning Business and Student Incentives, and Higher Education Innovation.](#)

Colorado has a strong foundation of policies that help high school students access college courses and work-based learning experiences. Some local implementations of these policies emphasize access for those most marginalized in their community, but Colorado does not have any stated priorities at the state level. To ensure that these opportunities are part of a consistent effort to address systemic inequities, Colorado should carefully design ways for each policy to engage those farthest from opportunity.

Key Questions

- ▶ Which local policies are resulting in disproportionately high participation from students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, come from traditionally underserved groups, or have individualized education plans?
- ▶ What are the barriers preventing students who qualify for free and reduced lunch, come from traditionally underserved groups, or have individualized education plans, from participating in work-based learning or college coursework?
- ▶ What can be learned from local policies and program enrollment practices?
- ▶ What does our attainment and workforce data say about who these programs should seek to prioritize?

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Policy Ideas and Adaptations

Updating current programs to explicitly name equity priorities could increase participation. Programs like Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), which gives students work experience and an associate degree and have a fixed number of seats available, can establish priorities for recruitment and enrollment. Statewide priorities could be established, or the state policy could dictate that each local system with these programs create a policy that identifies groups they intend to target, and how they will work to get their disproportionate participation.

The Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP), which provides financial incentives for schools and districts that help students earn industry credentials, could be updated to increase the level of financial incentive for each student who earns an industry credential and is a member of one or more priority groups identified in the statute. For example, there could be three tiers of funding: a base level for students in none of the priority groups, a second level for students in one priority group, and a third level for students in two or more priority groups.

The Innovative Learning Opportunity Pilot (ILOP), which releases high schools from seat time requirements in exchange for career and college innovation, could include a competitive priority for innovation plans that include clear plans to positively impact proportions of target groups participating in the career and college readiness innovations included in their ILOP 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

COLORADO SUCCEEDS 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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