



Reimagining High School

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

Prior to COVID-19, Colorado already faced a leaky talent pipeline and significant gaps in post-secondary and workforce outcomes across a range of demographic groups. This has motivated many of Colorado Succeeds' policy efforts in recent years:

- ▶ supporting Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH), which gives students work experience and an associate degree,
- ▶ the Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP), which provides financial incentives for schools and districts that help students earn industry credentials, and
- ▶ the Innovative Learning Opportunity Pilot (ILOP), which releases high schools from seat time requirements in exchange for career and college innovation.

This year, there is a new urgency to bringing greater value and relevance to the high school experience. Students are facing the challenge of finishing high school remotely, and they are seeing post-secondary opportunities compromised by COVID-19. As a result, youth are at a much higher risk of becoming disengaged from career or college pathways. The [Measure of America](#) tracks data on disengaged youth (teens and young adults ages 16 to 24 who are neither attending school nor working). In their June 2020 report, they anticipate a jump in the disengaged youth rate from 1 in 9 young people last year to 1 in 5, or even 1 in 4, in the coming year.

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Key Questions

- ▶ What are districts learning about how many high school learners have opted out of engaged learning this year?
- ▶ What are districts learning about where the spring 2020 graduates went and what they are doing?
- ▶ How can high schools offer relevant opportunities to learn that blend in-person and virtual academic study with in-person and virtual work-based learning experiences?
- ▶ How can students themselves be given greater choice and agency in high school?
- ▶ What do students want and need from their schools to be engaged and participating in ongoing learning experiences?

Policy Ideas and Adaptations

Idaho has a policy that has been implemented and refined over several years that provides a total of \$4,125 to each student that is accessible in grades 7-12 to customize their middle school and high school education. They can pay for college courses online or on-campus, Advanced Placement exams, certification tests, and workforce development and apprenticeship courses.

A Colorado adaptation of this idea could focus resources on the last two years of high school. It may also have differentiated dollar amounts based on free and reduced lunch status to ensure it is explicitly an equity-seeking program. Colorado could also explore giving a portion of fourth year per pupil funding to students who meet academic graduation prior to their last semester.

The current Innovative Learning Opportunity Pilot (ILOP) gives schools the flexibility to engage high school learners in both in-school and out-of-school learning, or to implement more engaging and time efficient competency-based learning and grading systems, without losing per pupil funding. The pilot could be expanded while incentivizing specific local policy changes that make it easier for learners to advocate for themselves and build independent studies and out-of-school learning experiences related to their career path.

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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