

# Career Development Incentive Program

## Overview

The Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP) was established in 2016 to encourage school districts and charter schools to provide industry-recognized certificate programs, internships, and pre-apprenticeship programs aligned with in-demand industries. Schools receive up to \$1,000 incentive payments to their school districts based on student completion in pre-approved programs. Over \$16 million has been distributed to school districts because of this program.

Districts receive funding for any student who:

- ▶ Earns an industry-recognized credential tied to an in-demand job,
- ▶ Finishes a qualified internship or apprenticeship program tied to industry needs, or
- ▶ Completes and passes an AP computer science course.

CDIP provides clear benefits to students and employers. Students graduate from high school with a set of in-demand skills and a certificate, enabling them to immediately plug into the workforce. With this strong footing, students can then choose to further their education, delve deeper into where they started, or even switch careers entirely. Businesses welcome these students because they arrive with real-world skills and industry-recognized credentials that demonstrate a level of commitment and interest in a profession. Employers are likely to hire a student with this background because they know these students have the knowledge and skills needed to succeed on the job.

All Colorado students deserve an education that is relevant, meaningful, and engaging—one that creates a future full of possibility—and CDIP supports this vision.



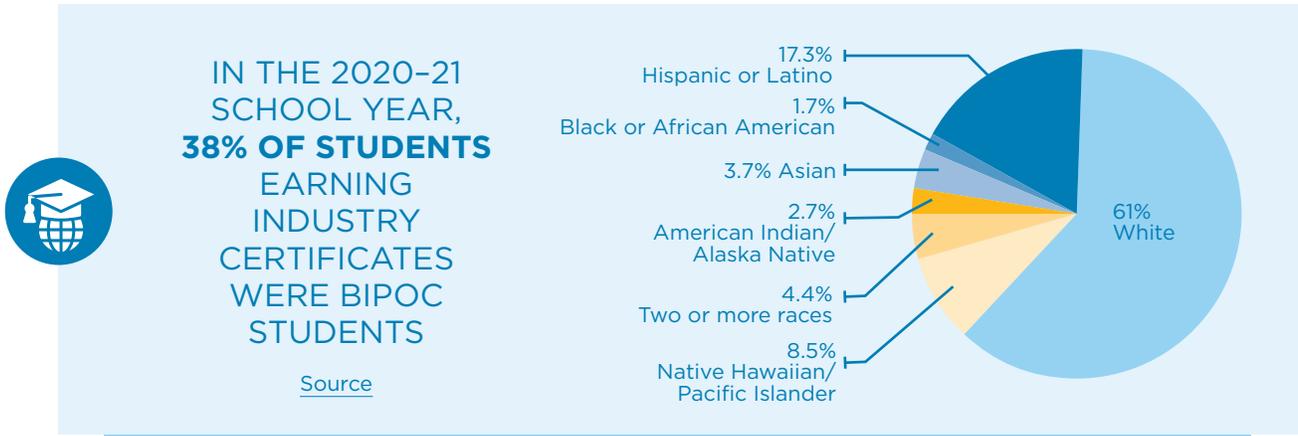
SINCE THE PROGRAM'S INCEPTION IN 2016, THERE HAVE BEEN **31,466 REQUESTS** FOR FUNDING, AND **21,754 CDIP PROGRAMS HAVE BEEN FUNDED**

[Source](#)

## Learnings & Best Practices

- ▶ Schools can request a new certification be included in the approved program list. This request system allows for a responsive list of in-demand credentials beyond what the state has already identified, giving schools the flexibility and agency to increase CDIP opportunities and respond to both student interest and industry demand.

- ▶ Maintaining a [Top 10 Industry Credentials](#) list empowers schools, learners and families to understand high-demand, low-supply industry credentials and tailor credential attainment to in-demand jobs and growing industries across Colorado.
- ▶ Students earn industry recognized credentials while still in high school. Often, industry certification is taught and earned in a postsecondary setting where students can earn college credit and aren't responsible for paying for their course.
- ▶ Industry certifications and career-connected learning opportunities bring relevancy back to the learner experience. The learner is outside of the classroom and experiencing different potential career pathways. Broader career exposure helps students better understand the diverse opportunity pathways available.



## Student Experience

### St. Vrain Valley School District

An exemplar in career-connected learning, St. Vrain Valley Schools is invested in ensuring students are prepared to thrive in the modern world and workplace. [The Innovation Center](#) in particular offers pathways in aeronautics, bioscience, cybersecurity, entrepreneurship, robotics, design, and information and communications technology. These programs help students explore careers in these industries, and credential funding outlined by the in-demand skills and industries outlined through CDIP also helps the school administration and staff understand what courses to offer.

Early in their high school career, Cass (name has been changed) did not know what they wanted to do after high school. Once they started bioscience courses, Cass knew they wanted to pursue a degree in biomedical engineering to design tools used in the healthcare industry. Due to resources available through CDIP, Cass has continued on the bioscience pathway to work toward this goal. St. Vrain's Innovation Center introduces students to a wide-variety of hands-on learning activities. The opportunities there help students develop job-focused strengths and interests.



**AS OF THE 2020-21 SCHOOL YEAR, 29% OF STUDENTS PARTICIPATING IN CDIP PROGRAMS QUALIFIED FOR FREE OR REDUCED LUNCH**

[Colorado Department of Education Data Request, 2022](#)

## Adams 12 Five Star Schools

Adams 12 Five Star Schools, 15 miles north of Denver, was an early adopter of CDIP and has made a concerted effort to encourage all students to consider industry certifications. Career and Technical Education (CTE) programming, also known as [FutureForward](#) in Adams 12 is offered within their five comprehensive high schools, one alternative high school and two dedicated CTE campuses known as FutureForward at Bollman and FutureForward at Washington Square.

Adams 12 has changed the narrative around CTE for learners and families. FutureForward classes highlight the skills and exposure these courses offer for students headed to college or career. Adams 12 learners can earn industry-standard certifications in 21 pathways from behavioral and mental healthcare to computer science. Students enrolled at any high school in the district may take these courses, and transportation is provided to the dedicated CTE campuses.

The CDIP funding Adams 12 receives for offering in-demand industry credentials goes back to the students as much as possible. In 2021–2022, the district used the funds in the following three ways:

1. Pay for the costs of the actual certification examinations as well as associated exams costs (including practice materials and annual memberships to professional organizations who provide the exams);
2. Purchase industry-standard equipment and supplies for programs where students earn industry credentials; and
3. Pay for required industry fees (like background checks) in associated programs offering industry credentials.



## National Context

Idaho’s approach to student success and high school transition puts money in the hands of the student to pursue opportunities aligned with their postsecondary plans. According to [Jobs for the Future](#), “when students reach seventh grade, they receive a stipend of \$4,125 to use for education related expenses, including state-approved college courses, Advanced Placement tests, International Baccalaureate programs, professional certification fees, and career and technical education (CTE) courses and apprenticeships.” This program, the [Advanced Opportunities Scholarship](#), encourages and empowers students to start building skills and experiences aligned to their future goals while still in high school.

In Florida, the [Career and Professional Education Act](#) (CAPE Act) seeks to close the gap between business and education, preparing students for in-demand jobs in Florida. With more than 10 years of success with the CAPE Act, Florida is expanding its approach to education to workforce pathways, [committing millions of dollars to evaluating and updating current systems](#) that serve learners, employers, and educators in streamlining their talent pipeline.



## Policy Recommendations

- ▶ **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.

- ▶ **Expand the Career Development Incentive Program to also include institutions of higher education as eligible entities.** If a significant increase in funding became available, additional dollars could be used to incentivize institutions of higher education to help more students at the collegiate level complete industry certifications and career-connected learning experiences aligned to in-demand jobs and industries.
- ▶ **Policy changes could also be made in terms of how the incentive dollars flow back to school districts.** Currently, the funding available for this program is not able to meet the overall demand for the program. If there are more credentials than funding available, the \$1,000 payment is proportionately reduced across all school districts. One idea worth exploring is prioritizing incentive dollars back to districts who are reporting students from target populations, like students who are eligible for free and reduced-price lunch.
- ▶ **Change who receives the incentive dollars.** Based on feedback from school districts and leaders, incentive dollars could be directed to the individual school or even the instructor who helped the student earn their industry certification instead of all incentive dollars going back to the school district. By directly rewarding the school or instructor who helps the student complete the certification, the program could more directly incentivize schools to produce more of these quality credentials.

