

# Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot

## Overview

The Innovative Learning Opportunities Pilot (ILOP) provides schools and districts with flexibility around seat time requirements so students can participate in more out-of-school learning opportunities. Established in 2019, this pilot has grown to include 25 districts and seven charter schools.

Through ILOP, participating school districts can count students as full-time while they participate in opportunities outside of school, like industry certificates, apprenticeships, and internships. Previously, many school districts would count these students as part-time and would receive a lower amount of state revenue based on per-pupil revenue (PPR). Most importantly, this program is contributing to the expansion of more students gaining real-world experience with businesses and community partners that will help them to develop essential 21st century skills that will propel them to greater postsecondary and career success.

Seat time policies usually require that students have a certain number of hours of instruction within the classroom walls and adherence to these standards is tied to state funding. Additionally, school districts must demonstrate a minimum number of teacher-pupil instruction and contact hours in the classroom to receive funding. In order to receive full-time funding for the student, a certain number of contact hours must be met. If documented hours fall under a threshold, the district receives less funding.

Flexible funding models, like ILOP, are a win-win for students and districts. This program allows for greater learner flexibility, better preparation for students to enter the workforce with real world experience and skills, while also protecting funding for the home district. The program was intended to act as safe harbor for school districts that want to explore more out-of-school learning for students but were concerned that audits from the state department of education would lead to decreased funding.

While the program has a limit on the number of districts that can participate, it is intended to scale each year with a goal set by the General Assembly to increase the number of districts participating in this program to 100% by 2025-26. [Colorado Education Initiative](#) provides implementation and network learning support to participating ILOP districts.



**IN THE 2020-21  
SCHOOL YEAR,  
600 STUDENTS  
PARTICIPATED IN ILOP,  
26% OF WHICH  
QUALIFIED FOR FREE  
OR REDUCED LUNCH**

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

## Learnings & Best Practices

Learning happens everywhere and ILOP helps students learn beyond the classroom and connect their real-world experiences to classroom instruction. Schools participating in ILOP are:

- ▶ Partnering with businesses to create career-connected learning opportunities that add value to the business and the student's experience. Stronger relationships between education and industry will help expand the out-of-classroom learning opportunities for students.
- ▶ Supporting students in successfully transitioning from high school to postsecondary education and/or the workforce.
- ▶ Ensuring school schedules facilitate internship opportunities. Restrictive course schedules and school bell schedules inhibit student's abilities to participate in internships. Exploring more flexible schedule options allows schools to find a solution that best meets student, family and community needs.



**OF THE  
47 SCHOOLS  
PARTICIPATING  
IN ILOP,  
5 ARE TITLE I  
SCHOOLS**

[ILOP participants](#)  
[Title 1 list](#)

## Student Experience

Holyoke School District, in the northeast corner of Colorado, joined the ILOP program in 2021. Historically, students in rural districts like Holyoke find it difficult to participate in internships due to local economic constraints and geography, and it may take up to 45 minutes to drive one-way to an internship.

Due to the flexibility ILOP affords Holyoke, high school senior Derick (name has been changed) is able to take on a full day internship to train at a local farm equipment and repair business, working toward a John Deere technician certificate. Derick is able to work with teachers and academic counselors to establish a balanced school and work schedule, and the school did not lose any funding due to his atypical schedule. The employer is also invested in Derick's training and development, paying for the certification to expand the businesses' services and relationship to the community. Agriculture is a key pillar of Holyoke's economy, and they need all the equipment technicians they can get to keep tractors running during growing season.

Holyoke's commitment to student outcomes and career-connected learning is why they are exploring all options to increase opportunities for students. From participation in the [Student-Centered Accountability Program](#) and [Homegrown Talent Initiative](#), they are helping students articulate real-world skills in and outside the classroom and thinking creatively about virtual and in-person career-connected learning options. By participating in ILOP, Holyoke joins the growing coalition of districts eagerly embracing career exploration and pushing on outdated measures like seat time.

## ILOP student participation

School Year	Student Participants	American Indian/ Alaska Native	Asian	Black or African American	Hispanic or Latino	White	Native Hawaiian/ Pacific Islander	Two or More Races
20-21	100	*	*	*	36%	55%	*	*
21-22	600	*	*	*	29.30%	63.50%	*	3%

*\*Data suppressed because of low N size*

## National Context

Education funding formulas were thrown into disarray with the COVID-19 pandemic. Many public systems were not equipped to provide virtual or hybrid instruction, and states were even less prepared to evaluate funding changes based on this new form of teaching and learning. According to the [Center on Reinventing Public Education](#) (CRPE), “most states fund schools based on measures of enrollment or attendance, and require schools to deliver a certain number of hours of instruction. Before the pandemic, instruction only counted if students were physically present at school, working directly with a teacher.”

In light of COVID’s impact, states are reviewing ways to remove seat time burdens. According to [KnowledgeWorks](#), there is agreement that numerous states are redefining hours of instruction and providing additional waivers. Even before COVID, states were testing new ways to measure student learning. New Hampshire continues to be a state to watch. In 2018 New Hampshire unveiled a program called [Learn Everywhere](#), setting up a framework for students to earn credit for learning regardless of where it occurred. While schools still must offer a minimum number of hours, an expanded definition of instructional time is allowing students to gain credit for those experiences in a way that doesn’t jeopardize funding for schools.



## Policy Recommendations

While the creation of ILOP was one way to test new measures of student learning and engagement outside of traditional measures, several policy proposals have been floated to address seat time more structurally:

- ▶ **Study the Average Daily Membership model.** The state could consider moving to an Average Daily Membership (ADM) model, which could start as a pilot or even be allowed for ILOP approved districts. The state should consider conducting a feasibility study about this kind of model and whether it could lead to more experiential learning. According to the [Aurora Institute](#), “Sixteen states use ADM and not seat time, where students are counted each day that they are enrolled in the district.” ADM would support more of a competency-based education system in Colorado.
- ▶ **Create a transportation fund within ILOP that would provide extra dollars to school districts or students to access career-connected learning opportunities.**
- ▶ **Include a competitive priority or additional incentive dollars to target underserved students and increase career-connected learning.** Programs like ILOP should strive to serve more students who are low income. A future policy could reward districts for innovation plans that include clear strategies to positively impact proportions of target groups participating in the career and college readiness innovations included in their ILOP application.

