

**Department of Education**  
**FY 2026-27 Joint Budget**  
**Committee Hearing Agenda**

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

1:30-5:00 pm

**1:30 –1:50**

**Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind**

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Main Presenters:

- Tera Spangler, Superintendent
- Beth Oliver, Controller
- Mike Nero, Director of Facilities

Supporting Presenters:

- Jonathan Karil, School for the Blind Principal
- Jaclyn Tyrcha, Director of Outreach
- Hugh Carey, Public Relations and Communication Manager

Topics:

- Introductions and Opening Comments
- Information on CSDB
- CSDB Cost/Value Impact
- CEASD/AER Accreditation
- West Hall Project
- Response to RFI 1 and Accreditation Process: Questions under CSDB in the packet, Slide 16

**2:00 – 2:15**

## **CDE - Introductions and Opening Comments**

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Presenter: Rebecca McClellan, Chair Colorado State Board of Education

**2:15 – 2:30**

## **CDE - Department Overview**

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Presenter: Susana Córdova, Commissioner of Education

**2:30 – 3:00**

## **CDE Grants**

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Main Presenters:

- Susana Córdova, Commissioner
- Wayne Peel, Chief Financial Officer

Topics:

- 2024 Grants Project: Page 1, Questions 1-3 in the packet, Slides 9-10
- SB 25-315: Page 4-7, Questions 4-7 in the packet, Slides 11-12
- State Board of Education 2026 Legislative Priorities: Slides 13-15

**3:00 – 3:30**

## **Proposed Reductions**

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Main Presenters:

- Susana Córdova, Commissioner
- Wayne Peel, Chief Financial Officer

Topics:

- Summary of Identified Offsets: Page 9, Question 9 in the packet, Slide 17
- READ Act Reduction: Page 11, Question 10 in the packet, Slide 18
- Educator Retention & Recruitment (ERR) Program: Slides 19-20
- State Grants to Libraries Program: Page 8, Question 8 in the packet, Slide 21
- HSMA & BEST Indirects: Page 10, Question 9 in the packet, Slide 22
- Remote CMAS Assessments: Page 11, Question 9 in the packet, Slide 23

**3:30 – 4:00**

**School Finance**

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Main Presenters:

- Susana Córdova, Commissioner
- Wayne Peel, Chief Financial Officer

Topics:

- Multilingual Learners: Page 15-23, Questions 13/15 in the packet, Slide 25
- Colorado Empowered Learning: Page 12-15, Questions 11-12 in the packet, Slides 26-28
- Part-Time Homeschool Enrichment: Page 24, Questions 16-17 in the packet, Slides 29-30

**4:30 – 5:00pm**

**Charter School Institute**

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Main Presenter:

- Terry Croy Lewis, Executive Director

Supporting Presenters:

- Janet Dinnen, Chief of Staff

Topics:

- Introductions and Opening Comments
- Response to Option for Capping CSI Mill Levy Equalization: Questions under CSI in the packet

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**Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind**

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***[Staff] Review your response to RFI 1 and your accreditation progress.***

The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind submitted a comprehensive summary of the progress the school has made on implementation of the recommendations from the Independent Program Review (IPR) that was developed in 2019. The full report outlines several areas of completion of the recommended actions and was shared with the Joint Budget Committee in the Fall of 2025. The CSDB has continued to prioritize the recommendations of the IPR and has made significant progress.

One major area of focus this year that was a recommendation of the IPR is obtaining national accreditation from the Conference of Educational Administrators of Schools and Programs for the Deaf (CEASD) and Association for Education & Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER). The CEASD accreditation is nationally recognized accreditation process for schools and programs serving students who are Deaf. This process is voluntary but highly valued, as it demonstrates a school's commitment to quality, accountability, continuous improvement and promote excellence in Deaf education.

Accreditation begins with a comprehensive self-study, where schools evaluate their performance against CEASD's twelve standards. These standards address foundational areas such as mission, governance, finances, and facilities, as well as operational components including educational programming, student services, residential life, and technology. The self-study serves as both a reflection and a roadmap for improvement. CSDB began its self-study during the 2024-2025 school year and will be submitting it to the CEASD accreditation team on December 19<sup>th</sup>, 2025.

The next phase involves an external review of the completed self-study and site visit conducted by a CEASD team of experienced professionals that work in schools for the Deaf across the nation. Over several days, the team examines documentation, interviews stakeholders, and observes programs in action. After the site visit concludes, the team will provide a report with their findings and recommend no accreditation, partial accreditation, or full accreditation. The report will include commendations for strengths and recommendations for areas of improvement.

The entire process typically spans 12 to 18 months, culminating in an accreditation decision. Accreditation is granted for seven years, after which schools undergo reaccreditation to maintain their status. This cycle promotes sustained excellence and responsiveness to evolving educational needs.

The Association for Education and Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually Impaired (AER) provides a nationally recognized accreditation program for schools and agencies serving individuals who are blind or have low vision. This process is designed to ensure that organizations deliver high-quality educational and rehabilitation services aligned with best practices and professional standards.

AER accreditation begins with a comprehensive self-study, where schools evaluate their performance against AER's standards. These standards encompass governance, leadership, fiscal responsibility, facilities, educational programming, student services, residential life, and technology integration. The self-study serves as both an internal audit and a strategic planning tool, identifying strengths and areas for improvement.

Following the self-study, schools submit documentation to AER's Organizations and Schools Accreditation Commission (OSAC). A review panel of experienced professionals examines the materials and conducts an on-site visit, typically lasting several days. During this visit, the team interviews staff, students, and stakeholders, observes classrooms and residential facilities, and assesses compliance with standards. The panel then provides commendations and recommendations to guide future growth.

The entire process generally spans 12 to 18 months, culminating in an accreditation decision by the AER Accreditation Council (AERAC). Accreditation is granted for seven years, after which schools must undergo reaccreditation to maintain their status. This cycle promotes continuous improvement and responsiveness to evolving educational needs.

CSDB has not been accredited through CEASD since 2003, and has never been accredited by AER or any other national Blind accreditation. Obtaining accreditation through CEASD and AER demonstrates CSDB's commitment to ensuring the programs

and services we provide align with national standards designed specifically for schools for the Deaf and Blind.

The accreditation process will provide recommendations that will be included in the next five-year Strategic Plan. CSDB will begin the Strategic Planning process in January 2026 and conclude in May 2026 with a newly developed Strategic Plan to guide the work and priorities for the next five years.



**Colorado School**  
**for the Deaf and the Blind**

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**Tera Spangler**  
Superintendent

**Beth Oliver**  
Controller

**Micheal Nero**  
Facilities Director



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**Colorado School**  
for the Deaf and the Blind



# Table of Contents

- What is CSDB?
- What defines CSDB?
- CSDB is our Hogwarts – a magical place where everyone feels at home in their own language and culture
- CSDB Cost/Value/Statewide Impact
- CEASD/AER accreditation
- West Hall Project



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**Colorado School**  
for the Deaf and the Blind

# What is CSDB?

Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind, based in Colorado Springs, is a Deaf, Blind, and DeafBlind-led public academy where language, learning, and leadership converge to build student growth and independence. For over 150 years, CSDB served families statewide through bilingual education, assistive technology, and outreach services that prepare learners to thrive in school and in the community.





♪ Inspirational Music



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**Colorado School**  
for the Deaf and the Blind

# Values

**Lived Leadership** – We are led by those who live the experience; Deaf and Blind leadership is embodied, rooted in lived truth, and active decision-making.

**Linguistic Power** – ASL and Braille are sovereign languages that generate power, presence, and growth.

**Relentless Rigor** – We raise the bar—and minds—with every step; challenge builds thinkers and rigor builds leaders.

**Transformative Trust** – We lead with emotional intelligence, vulnerability, and shared accountability.

**Generative Knowledge** – Deaf and Blind ways of knowing spark innovation and shape how we learn through visual, tactile, and embodied intelligence.



# Identity and Belonging

## Hogwarts vs Residential Schools for Deaf and Blind Students



Hogwarts



Residential Schools

<b>Arrival Experience</b>	Entering a magical world where abilities are normalized and celebrated.	Entering a community where communication and accessibility are the norm.
<b>Community Integration</b>	Students integrate through shared language and culture.	Students integrate through shared language (ASL, Braille) and culture.
<b>Language and Culture</b>	Magical language and spells unite students.	ASL, Braille, and tactile signing are cultural markers and identity anchors.
<b>Role Models</b>	Professors and older students model magical mastery and House values.	Deaf and Blind adults model success and cultural pride.
<b>Cultural Validation</b>	Being magical is celebrated, not hidden.	Deaf/Blind identity affirmed; difference seen as strength, not deficit.
<b>Tradition and Events</b>	Quidditch feasts, Yule Ball create shared memories.	Deaf Awareness Week, Braille competitions, cultural celebrations.







## CSDB's Costs Reflect Specialized Services for a Low-Incidence Population

- CSDB serves students who are deaf, hard of hearing, blind, or deafblind—populations that require **highly specialized services** that are not feasible for each district to replicate.
- Centralizing expertise at CSDB prevents the need for 178 districts to hire their own ASL specialists, braille instructors, orientation & mobility instructors, deafblind specialists, audiologists, interpreters, and specialized mental health providers.



# CSDB Is Often the First *Effective* Investment

When students gain immediate access to accessible language and specialized instruction:

- Academic gaps begin to close
- Intensive service needs decrease
- Students build the communication, literacy, and independence skills essential for success beyond K–12
- Families receive coordinated support that districts cannot always provide

# Many Students Arrive After Years of High Local District Spending

Before attending CSDB, students often experience:

- Limited language access (ASL or braille)
- Years of significant district and federal expenditures for special education services
- Repeated evaluations or interventions with limited progress

By the time they reach CSDB, students may be **multiple grade levels behind** despite substantial prior investment.

# The Greater Cost Is When Students Are *Not* Served Early and Appropriately

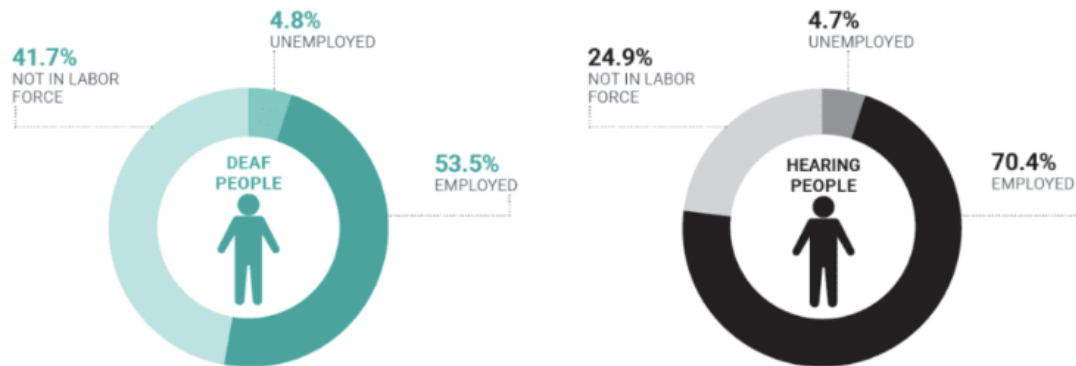
The statewide costs of inadequate early access include:

- Higher long-term special education intensity
- Increased behavioral and mental health needs
- Lower postsecondary readiness
- Reduced employment and independence in adulthood

# Deaf in Labor Force

Deaf people in the United States are less likely to be employed than hearing people, and employment rates vary widely by race, ethnicity, and disability. This is according to new data from the National Deaf Center on Postsecondary Outcomes (NDC).

NDC's [data dashboard](#) shows that only 54% of deaf people are employed, compared to 70% of hearing people. The unemployment rate for deaf people is similar to the general population, but deaf people of color, deafdisabled people, and deafblind people are more likely to be unemployed.



*Bloom, Palmer & Winninghoff, 2023 [nationaldeafcenter.org/dashboard](https://nationaldeafcenter.org/dashboard)*

# Blind in Labor Force

**4.28 MILLION**

Working-age adults with visual impairments in 2023

## In Labor Force

**2.43 MILLION**

people with visual impairments



**52.3%**

**Employed**

Currently  
working

**8.1%**

**Unemployed**

Not working but  
actively seeking work

## Not in Labor Force

**1.84 MILLION**

people with visual impairments



**43.1%**

**Not in labor force**

Not working and not  
currently seeking work

Want to learn about the calculations behind the statistics? Scan to learn more:

Source: Data from the U.S. Census Bureau, 2023 American Community Survey 1-year estimates, people with visual impairments (ages 18–64) in the U.S. civilian noninstitutionalized population.

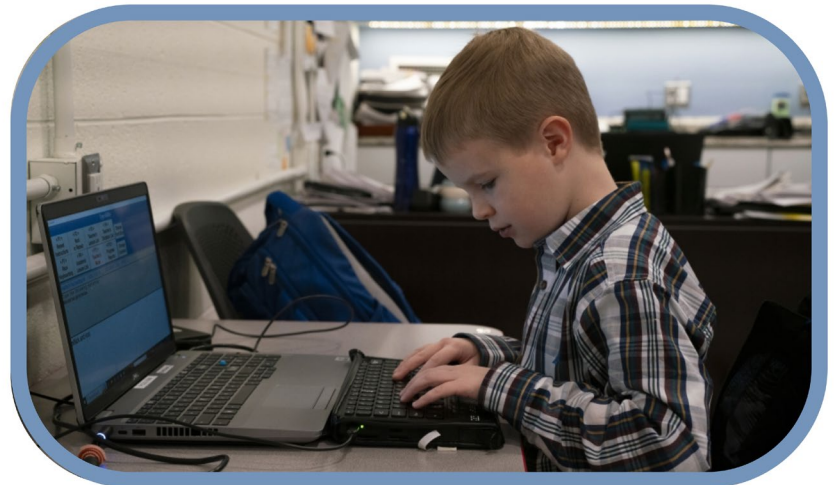


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# CEASD/AER Accreditation Update

- Purpose
- Standards
- Process
- Timeline
- Strategic Plan







## West Hall Project

- Blind School is currently housed in Adams Hall
- Early Education Program is currently housed in the Early Education Center (EEC) with Student Health
- Adams Hall and EEC both require extensive renovations and cannot meet current program needs
- Combining both programs into a renovated and expanded West Hall is cost effective and best for both programs

# West Hall Project Cost

CSDB will request State funding in two phases:

## **Phase 1 FY26-27 - \$13,778,673**

- Design & CM/GC fees
- EV Charging Stations
- Public Art • Solar Panels
- Chiller Plant Expansion
- Backup Generator

## **Phase 2 FY26-27 - 55% State (\$15,897,641) & 45% BEST Grant (\$13,007,161)**

- Asbestos Abatement
- Renovate 17,256 sf & 10,000 sf Addition
- ADA Accessibility (elevator, entrances, etc.)
- Preschool Playground

**Apply for \$12,043,667 BEST Grant February 2026 for award in July 2026**



# How Harry Potter Parallels With The Deaf World – By Nyle DiMarco



# Thank you..

For many, Hogwarts is the first place where students who felt different or isolated in the Muggle world finally feel understood and being magical is a gift.

The magic of a school for the Deaf and Blind is in an environment designed for their language and culture—where lived experiences shape learning, belonging is felt deeply, and students gain agency to define their future.



Department of Education

**FY 2026-27 Joint Budget  
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Tuesday, December 9, 2025  
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**Budget Reduction Options and Second Round of Grant Project**

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**Background from the Department:**

The Department appreciates the Committee's continued interest and partnership in the improvement work initiated through the 2024 Grant Project. The Grant Project Report identified significant opportunities to strengthen the coordination, efficiency, and effectiveness of the Department's grant programs, particularly where overlapping objectives or administrative processes created unnecessary complexity for districts and other grantees. **The project also confirmed that grantees consistently report that existing grant programs are meeting important local and statewide needs**, underscoring the importance of improving — not necessarily reducing — these investments to ensure they are sustainable and accessible to all eligible participants.

Substantial progress was made during the 2025 Legislative Session, due in large part to the work of the Joint Budget Committee through Senate Bill 25-315, which consolidated several of the Department's grant and funding streams. SB25-315 established a foundation for more coherent and coordinated funding structures for both the Department and local education agencies.

Over the last seven months, the Department has been focused on implementing SB25-315 as enacted, ensuring that programs affected by the consolidation transition smoothly and remain aligned with their statutory purposes. This work is providing valuable insights into how future modifications can improve service delivery while maintaining accountability and responsiveness to local needs.

Consistent with the findings of the 2024 Grant Project, the Department remains committed to continuous improvement in grant administration—focusing on streamlining processes, reducing administrative burden, and improving coordination across programs to better support schools, districts, and students.

**1. *[Rep. Sirota] What programs/groups of programs does the Department propose be consolidated and restructured as part of the second round of grants consolidation? What programs could be eliminated as part of this process?***

During the November meeting, the State Board of Education adopted 2026 legislative priorities around aligning *“the use of grants and CDE’s processes in an intentional, coherent and strategic fashion to better meet students’ needs,”* and re-adopted a framework for continuation of the grant project work that *“Ensures grant programs include clear and measurable metrics of success and funding for a thorough evaluation and review. [And] Aligns funding with three clear frameworks established by the State Board of Education:*

- *Competitive Grants – Used sparingly and focused on testing innovative ideas or demonstrating new practices that can be scaled or replicated statewide.*
- *Targeted Distribution – Uses data and need-based indicators to direct resources where they are most needed, focusing on building local capacity and long-term impact.*
- *Universal/Core Services – Provides equitable access for all schools and districts through per-pupil funding or shared systems that streamline support and reduce administrative burden. Grant programs are not a sustainable replacement for funding core services.”*

In alignment with that direction, the Department will present potential options to the Board at its December 10th meeting. The materials for the meeting are available on [BoardDocs](#).

Once the Board has reviewed the potential options, the Department looks forward to continuing to work with the Joint Budget Committee as partners in this effort to advance thoughtful improvements to the state’s grant infrastructure.

**2. *Provide additional information on the remaining non-categorical grant programs listed on p. 33 and 34 of the staff briefing document.***

Additional details for each grant program listed on pages 33 and 34 of the JBC staff briefing document are in the appendix.

**a. [Rep. Taggart] How many school districts benefit from each of these programs? Are these districts large? Small? Rural? Remote Rural?**

The Department has included the distribution of funds between rural and non-rural schools for each of the grant programs identified by JBC staff in the appendix.

**b. [Sen. Amabile] Which of these programs could be scaled down?**

The 2024 Grant Project found that existing grant programs are meeting critical local and statewide needs. Rather than identifying programs to scale down or eliminate, the project underscored the importance of strategic improvements — including better alignment, coordination, streamlining access/reducing administrative burden, and evaluation — to ensure that resources are distributed in both a more equitable and effective manner.

Consistent with this direction, the Department’s ongoing work is focused on improving coherence and efficiency across programs, reducing administrative burden, and enhancing impact with the intention of strengthening the return on the state’s investment.

The Department recognizes that the Committee faces a challenging fiscal environment as it considers priorities for the upcoming budget cycle and will continue to work closely with the Committee and JBC staff to evaluate opportunities to streamline processes and leverage efficiencies where possible. As mentioned above, once the State Board of Education has reviewed potential options for the next phase of the Grants Project, the Department looks forward to continuing to work with the Joint Budget Committee as partners in advancing thoughtful improvements to the state’s grant infrastructure.

**3. [Sen. Amabile] Overall, what programs support mental health services in school? What is the total funding? Is there duplication?**

As defined in the [Behavioral Health Administration 2023 Strategic Plan](#), “behavioral health” refers to an individual’s mental and emotional well-being and actions that affect an individual’s overall wellness. Behavioral health issues and disorders include substance use disorders, mental health disorders, serious psychological distress, serious mental disturbance, and suicide and range from unhealthy stress or subclinical conditions to diagnosable and treatable diseases. “Behavioral health” also describes service systems that encompass promotion of emotional health and prevention and treatment services for mental health disorders and substance use disorders.

The Colorado Behavioral Health Administration (BHA), in response to the Long Bill FY 2023-24 Department of Human Services Request for Information (RFI) #19, [provided this report](#) to the Joint Budget Committee summarizing statewide funding for behavioral health programs and services across all state agencies in Nov. 2023. This report provides the most complete picture of programs that support mental health services in schools. CDE's section begins on page 24. The report identified six programs totaling \$20,651,836 in FY2023-24. As of FY2025-26, five programs remain, and the Department has submitted an initial proposal to the SBE to streamline three of the five.

Additionally, BHA compiles a summary table of the FY 2024-25 Statewide Appropriations by Agency for Behavioral Health Programs, [available here](#). **Overall, CDE accounts for ~0.8% of all statewide programming.**

It is important to note that the programs included in CDE's portion of the report are not for direct administration of services by the Department, and are rather unique/specific to CDE. For example, the programs included in the report may involve specific curriculum or practices that are aligned with the Colorado academic standards, or funding for mental and behavior health professionals who are licensed by CDE to practice in school settings.

**To ensure CDE programs are complementary and coordinated – rather than duplicative of other statewide efforts – CDE coordinates with other agencies around mental health work through the [BHA's Children and Youth Behavioral Health Implementation \(CYBHI\) plan](#).** There are quarterly meetings with all of the relevant state agencies that the BHA hosts, and CDE has milestones within the plan. The table on page 24 of the [CYBHI plan](#) provides a helpful visual summary of school behavioral health alignment across four state agencies. This has been such a helpful tool for role clarity and alignment among the partner agencies that the visual is [frequently updated](#).

## 2025 Session Action on Postsecondary Workforce Readiness

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4. ***[Rep. Taggart/Sen. Amabile/Rep. Sirota] Discuss how funding is changing for postsecondary workforce readiness programs, based on last year's legislation.***

Senate Bill 25-315 created a postsecondary and workforce readiness funding model that includes three types of funding:



- **Start-Up Fund:** The Start-Up Fund is intended to help districts create and/or significantly expand postsecondary and workforce readiness programs so every student has access to the Big Three (postsecondary credits, industry-recognized credentials and work-based learning opportunities).
- **Sustain Fund:** The Sustain Fund is intended to provide outcomes-based funding to all districts for student attainment of the Big Three, similar to how the Career Development Incentive Program has operated in the past.
- **Buckner Innovation Fund:** After three years, the Start-Up Fund converts to become the Buckner Innovation Fund, which will provide financial support to districts based on their performance within the postsecondary and workforce readiness state accountability sub-indicator revised by House Bill 25-1278.

The Start-Up Fund rulemaking hearing and final vote will take place at the February 2026 State Board of Education meeting. The Sustain Fund notice of rulemaking will occur at the same meeting. The Buckner Innovation Fund rulemaking will occur around March 2027 so a request for applications can be released during the 2027-28 school year, with awards made by July 2028, when the Buckner funding becomes available.

**5. Clarify which programs were reduced/eliminated in the Long Bill and S.B. 25-315 and how that provided \$9.5 million of savings.**

Several programs were reduced and/or eliminated between the Long Bill, SB25-315, SB25-219, and SB25-220. A full summary of the total, ongoing \$9.5 million reduction is in the following tables.

Legacy Programs:

Program	Original Budget	FY 2025-26 Budget	FY 2026-27 Budget
Accelerated College Opportunity Exam Fee Grant program	\$565,136	\$0	\$0
Career Advisor Training Grant Program	\$1,000,000	\$0	\$0
Auto Enrollment in Advanced Courses Grant Program	\$247,914	\$0	\$0
Career Development Incentive Program (CDIP)	\$9,521,670	\$5,000,000	\$0

<b>Program</b>	<b>Original Budget</b>	<b>FY 2025-26 Budget</b>	<b>FY 2026-27 Budget</b>
Concurrent Enrollment Expansion and Innovation	\$1,476,948	\$0	\$0
Accelerating Students through Concurrent Enrollment (ASCENT)	\$20,808,040	\$14,104,992	\$0
Pathways in Technology Early College High School (P-TECH)	\$1,131,840	\$1,131,840	\$1,131,840
Teacher Recruitment Education and Preparation (TREP)	\$2,620,000	\$2,620,000	\$2,620,000
Totals	\$37,371,548	\$22,856,832	\$3,751,840
Difference from Original Budget		-\$14,514,716	-\$33,619,708

New programs based on SB25-315:

<b>Program</b>	<b>FY 2025-26</b>	<b>FY 2026-27</b>
Start up Grants	\$4,536,498	\$10,014,716
Office of Post-Secondary Workforce Readiness	\$482,217	\$470,670
Sustain Funding		\$13,371,184
Grant Administration	-\$3,999	\$55,377
IMS Data		\$84,825
Public School Finance		\$122,936
Total	\$5,014,716	\$24,119,708
Difference from FY 2025-26 Original	-\$9,500,000	-\$9,500,000

As shown in the tables above, the overall savings from the reduced programs compared with the new programs established in SB25-315 is approximately \$9.5 million each year.

**6. Clarify the anticipated FY 2026-27 second year impacts for S.B. 25-315. What annualization corrections will you be submitting?**

The overlap with HB24-1278 and the impacts of SB25-315 required multiple modifications to annualize required changes in the FY26-27 submission. A data entry error resulted in not including the required annualizations for SB25-315 in



the November 1st budget submission. As a result, the Department will be submitting an annualization correction to align the second-year (FY26-27) impacts with the original fiscal note estimate for SB25-315. The corrected amount is reflected in the data below.

The Department is also implementing additional checks/quality control measures before all future submissions are finalized to ensure similar entry errors do not occur. The required annualizations are outlined in the following table:

Program	Original Nov 1 Entry	Corrected Amount	Incremental Change from Nov 1 Request
PWR Startup	\$4,536,498	\$10,014,716	\$5,478,218
PWR Sustain	\$0	\$13,371,184	\$13,371,184
Office of Post Secondary Workforce	\$482,217	\$470,670	-\$11,547
Grants Administration	\$0	\$55,377	\$55,377
Information Management Services	\$0	\$84,825	\$84,825
Public School Finance Administration	\$0	\$122,936	\$122,936

This table matches the one above that shows a total of \$9.5 million in savings.

## ***7. Provide an update on the implementation of Postsecondary Workforce Readiness Start-up Funding.***

For the 2025-26 budget year through the 2027-28 budget year, the Colorado Department of Education shall use a formula, as defined in statute and state board rule, to determine Start-Up funding for local education providers. The funding is to be used for eligible expenses that are associated with developing and implementing a postsecondary and workforce readiness program. The Start-Up Fund is intentionally not a competitive grant. Instead, funding for each district is determined by a needs-based formula using data CDE has already collected from school districts. Districts will opt-in to the funding with an assurance that funds will be used for eligible expenses. If a district does not want funding, the money is put back into the fund to be distributed to districts that are accepting Start-Up funds.

The Start-Up Fund Notice of Rulemaking occurred at the [September 2025 State Board of Education meeting](#). An informal, anonymous survey about the Start-Up Rules garnered 129 responses to the survey, with the majority of respondents

serving rural schools (74%) and identifying as school district staff (54%). In addition to the survey, CDE staff met with multiple stakeholder groups over 24 individual meetings to explain the proposed Start-Up Fund rules and collect feedback. Significant updates to the rules were made as a result of this feedback, so the rulemaking hearing was held, as noticed, at the [November 2025 State Board of Education meeting](#), but the formal vote on the rules will occur later. Throughout the feedback opportunities, it became clear that stakeholders wanted to be able to see the draft Sustain Fund rules prior to the State Board taking a final vote on the Start-Up rules, so the final Start-Up Fund rulemaking hearing will be at the February 2026 State Board meeting. CDE expects to distribute the first round of Start-Up funding in April 2026.

**8. [Rep. Sirota]: If we cut State Grants to Publicly Supported Libraries, how would that impact local libraries? Is it a significant hit to specific libraries?**

The State Grants to Publicly Supported Libraries is a \$2.9 million formula grant that distributes funding to 313 school and public libraries across the state to purchase educational resources (print books, eBooks, electronic resources) for Coloradans to access. More than a third of all grantees report that this funding accounts for at least 50% of their collections budget. The tiered formula:

- Provides a base amount of funding based on the population size (for public libraries) or enrollment (for school libraries), and
- For entities serving populations over 10,000, an additional \$.24 per person is provided via the formula.

**Funding Tiers**

Population/Enrollment	Amount
1 to 999	\$4,500
1,000 to 4,999	\$5,000
5,000 to 9,999	\$5,500
10,000+	\$5,500 + \$0.24 per capita

If the General Assembly reduces the grant by \$175,000, CDE would maintain the current base funding tiers for all libraries, but would decrease the per capita

funding for those over 10,000 from \$.24 to \$.20. If this methodology is used, nearly a quarter (seventy-seven of the 313 libraries) would receive reductions. The reductions would range anywhere from \$12 (0.2% of the original distribution) to \$20,808 (14.2% of the original distribution). It is also important to note that these grants have not seen any inflationary adjustment in over five years. Any reduction will further erode their ability to help sustain the State Library system.

**9. [Staff] If not addressed above, please respond to the Additional Options for General Fund Relief (briefing table on pages 31 & 32) and discuss the reductions proposed by the Department.**

Additional details for each grant program listed on pages 31 and 32 of the JBC staff briefing document are in the appendix. The responses for non-grant programs from pages 31 & 32 of the briefing document are below:

***Eliminate Funding/Refinance Legacy Nutrition Programs***

The Colorado State Board of Education has not taken a position regarding the legacy Nutrition Programs being folded into the Healthy School Meals for All (HSMA) program. The Department can see the benefit of simplifying the various nutrition programs into the HSMA program.

Because HSMA is still developing and federal policy or funding changes outside the state's control could affect the program in future years, the General Assembly may wish to maintain the existing statutory framework—but not the funding—for the legacy programs. This approach could provide continuity and preserve legislative intent if significant federally driven changes to HSMA occur.

Either way, the Department does not see material administrative challenges with a statutory change to fold these programs into HSMA.

***Science Professional Development (HB24-1446)***

The Department proposed, and the Colorado State Board of Education approved, eliminating the final year of Science Professional Development as part of the overall reduction package.

While the training is advantageous, the Department understands that the FY26-27 budget will require a series of difficult decisions made by evaluating trade-offs. During the Department's "zero-based budgeting" light process, the Department evaluated that the training – which was designed to be accessed statewide and is therefore not aligned with a specific curriculum or for a specific

grade level – had less significant impact than other, higher-value programs within the Department.

Additionally, the Department felt that significant benefit from the first part of implementation was realized and that the savings from the elimination of the final year would be better than some of the alternatives given the need for additional budget savings. This was emphasized by the fact that the \$1.5 million is currently unencumbered and a reduction would not directly impact the currently awarded contract. However, the Department defers to the Governor, General Assembly, and other policy makers in finalizing which budget savings options are the most efficacious.

### ***Eliminate/Consolidate/Shrink Additional Grant Programs that Distribute Funds to Schools***

The elimination/consolidation/shrinking of grant programs is addressed in questions 1 and 2. Additionally, the State Board of Education is reviewing a potential approach during their December meeting. Please see the [BoardDocs](#) posted online and other materials shared in the grant questions section of this document.

### ***Increase Indirect Cost Offsets***

Department staff presented this option to the Colorado State Board of Education, however, they expressed concerns regarding the Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) program. The Board did not take action on this proposal, and noted that the existing revenue cap on BEST limits the program's ability to address facility needs statewide, and that additional impacts from indirect cost collections could further reduce available funding.

Department staff have not revisited this issue with the Board since the passage of HSMA related ballot measures Prop LL or MM.

### ***Eliminate Social Studies Assessment***

The Department proposed, and the State Board of Education approved, eliminating the state Social Studies Assessment. The federal Elementary and Secondary Education Act (ESEA) does not require social studies assessments, and Colorado does not use these results in the state's school accountability system. With high school social studies assessments already discontinued, the remaining assessments — administered on a sampling basis in elementary and middle schools — provide limited insight into student performance. Given these

factors, the Department determined that the benefit of continuing the assessment is outweighed by the cost of administration.

The State Board has not yet reviewed the proposal that was submitted as part of the Governor's November 1st budget submission.

### ***Eliminate Remote Testing (SB24-070)***

In 2025, the **CMAS participation rate for fully online students in grades 3-8 was approximately 23% versus approximately 91% for their “brick and mortar” school counterparts**. As a result, it is very difficult to understand the performance levels of online schools and students, which makes school improvement very challenging.

Lower participation may at least be partially attributed to the fact that despite their normal courses being fully online, CMAS administration for these students takes place in person, and requires traveling to a designated testing location.

SB24-070, requires the Department, by the spring of 2026 to make a remote testing option available to students who attend schools that are fully online. In the spring of 2025, the Department piloted the remote testing option and had lower participation than hoped for, but participation in the study did not replace participation in spring 2025 CMAS in-person testing.

Fully remote administration in the spring of 2026 will provide more accurate insight into the value of remote assessments and the state's overall return on investment. The Department has set initial internal benchmarks for participation across the next three years, with plans of evaluating and refining them as needed in the first year. ***Given the rapid growth in online enrollment, the General Assembly may wish to wait for more complete data prior to eliminating this testing option.***

## **Decision Items – Early Literacy**

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### **R5 READ ACT Evaluation and Awareness and R8 Administrative Efficiencies**

***10. [Rep. Taggart] These requests reduce appropriations from the Early Literacy Fund, which is supported by a \$34.0 million transfer from the State Education Fund. What will happen to those savings? Are you requesting that the transfer from the State Education Fund be reduced?***

In the Schedule 9 submitted for the Early Literacy Cash Fund, the Department modeled the reduction of these budget cuts as reducing the transfer from the State Education Fund. However, the Department is aware that there are balancing challenges within the MTCF (MTCF supports a significant part of the READ Act) as well, and therefore, the Department did not specify in the actual request whether the savings would be realized in the MTCF or SEF, and instead left that to the General Assembly to decide where the primary need would be.

## **RFI2: Supplemental Online Education Services and Online Education**

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**11. [Staff] Discuss the Department's response to the Supplemental Online Education Services RFI. Given that the redesignation of a BOCES for this program must occur in the next year, discuss the proposal to provide a shorter period designation (instead of 5 years), collaborate with the BOCES to review program performance, and establish measures of program effectiveness. Is a statutory change required for this?**

The Department has included the full response to the JBC's Request for Information in the appendix.

A short designation period, coupled with expanded data-sharing authority, would allow the Department to conduct and provide a more comprehensive evaluation of the program and its impact. CDE's current ability to fully assess the program's alignment to equity and outcome goals is limited by two related data constraints:

- **Participant identification:** CDE does not collect student-level data for CDLS and this data is not required to be shared by local districts with the BOCES; therefore, the Department cannot determine who participates or disaggregate participation by student subgroup (e.g., socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, disability, or English-learner status).
- **Assessment participation:** Because individual students are not identified, the Department cannot determine whether students taking CDLS courses participate in statewide assessments through their home districts. Without this information, it is not possible to evaluate CDLS's overall impact on academic outcomes or alignment with state standards.

As outlined in the Department's response to the RFI, one option the General Assembly may wish to consider is allowing the Department to redesignate the

current BOCES for a one-year period while authorizing the collection of additional program data to more fully assess impact.

It is immediately unclear whether extending the redesignation period would require a statutory change; however, the Department would appreciate direction from the committee. A statutory change would be required to allow both CDE and the designated BOCES to collect and share student-level data.

**12. [Staff] Discuss the broader growth of fully online education mentioned in the RFI and implications for the state budget. What does the State know about the quality and outcomes for Colorado-funded online education?**

Online learning programs — including multi-district and single-district online schools — have lower assessment participation rates among students enrolled. As a result, consistent evaluation of outcomes and quality across all online models remains difficult.

There are **44 multi-district online schools (MDOLS)** and **16 single-district online schools (SDOLS)** under Article 30.7 of Title 22, C.R.S. Together, these programs account for most of the state’s online enrollment and serve students across all regions.

Statewide online enrollment increased sharply during the pandemic — rising more than 50 percent between 2019–20 and 2020–21 — and has remained well above pre-pandemic levels. This sustained participation demonstrates that online learning has become a durable feature of Colorado’s education system.

*Figure 1*

*Total Enrollment-Online Schools and Programs (as defined in § 22-30.7-105, C.R.S.)*

School Year	Total Online Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2018-19	21,246	-----
2019-20	22,448	5.7% Increase
2020-21	32,034	42.7% Increase
2021-22	31,382	2.0% Decrease

School Year	Total Online Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2022-23	30,799	1.9% Decrease
2023-24	31,839	3.4% Increase
2024-25	33,629	5.6% Increase
2025-26	*Enrollment count is finalized in January 2026	-----

Online schools are evaluated through the state's accountability system. The table below shows general performance framework results as of 2024 (2025 data will not be finalized until mid-December).

*Figure 2*  
2024 Final School Performance Framework Plan Type by school type

School Plan Type	Non-Online Schools		Online Schools		All Schools	
	#	%	#	%	#	%
Performance	1193	67.5%	18	29.5%	1211	66.2%
Improvement	353	20.0%	12	19.7%	365	20.0%
Priority Improvement	93	5.3%	1	1.6%	94	5.1%
Turnaround	35	2.0%	1	1.6%	36	2.0%
Insufficient State Data	93	5.3%	29	47.5%	122	6.7%
<b>Total</b>	<b>1767</b>		<b>61</b>		<b>1828</b>	

There are a few points of comparison that are worth noting:



- Online schools have a lower state assessment participation rate (approximately 23% compared to approximately 91% in 2025 statewide across grades 3-8).
- Schools are assigned an Insufficient State Data rating when total participation is below 25% or when they have a small n-count, which means there is not enough publicly reportable data to calculate a plan type. Online schools have a much higher incidence of Insufficient State Data rating (47.5% compared to 6.7% of all schools).
- Online schools generally have similar percentages of schools with Improvement, Priority Improvement and Turnaround plan types as compared to non-online schools.
- Online schools have lower percentages of schools in the highest performance plan type (i.e., Performance).

Because participation is low, it is difficult to assess where the 47.5% of schools with Insufficient State Data ratings may fall within the four performance plan categories. Online schools with no brick-and-mortar facilities will have the option to engage in remote proctoring of CMAS assessments in spring of 2026. It is difficult to predict the impact of remote proctoring on participation in state assessments in the future. Online schools will also continue to have the option of administering the assessments to students in person.

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## Categorical Programs and Formula Factors

### Categorical Funding/Student Factors

***13. [Rep. Sirota/Sen. Kirkmeyer/Sen. Bridges] Describe how formula distributions related to the ELL and Special Education factors interact with categorical program funding. How do we know that schools are spending the categorical money on the intended uses? Are there specific requirements? What transparency does the Department have?***

ELL and Special Education currently receive two separate funding distributions, one through the categoricals and one through the new School Finance Formula.



#### **Categorical Funding:**

Colorado School Districts may receive additional state funding to pay for programs designed to serve particular groups of students with certain needs. Each categorical program has unique statutory requirements in how the funding

for the program is calculated, allocated, and spent by the districts. These funds are not distributed via the funding formula in order to ensure districts are funding programs directed at these student populations and programs.

Since these funds are distributed outside of the funding formula, local share is not calculated into the total distribution mechanism. Thus, funds are distributed on a purely statutory basis and not offset by a district's local funds. The legislature has also written these funds as distributions on a total dollar amount basis instead of a weighted basis like the formula, meaning these formulas are designed to meet a certain dollar amount instead of the formula producing the total amount of funds needed. CRS 22-55-107 requires the general assembly to annually increase funding for all categorical programs by at least the rate of inflation each budget year.

Annually, a request for at least the statutory minimum increases for all categorical programs is provided in the R-2 request (

 CDE - FY27 R-02: Categorical Program Inflation Increase ). The chart provided under Appendix A (  CDE - FY27 RFI 1 Categorical Distribution ) shows the total funding for all categorical programs broken out by program and state / federal splits and the gap between how much funding a district receives for each program and how much a district spends on that program.

For FY25-26 the State made available a total of \$559,213,118 in state dollars for categorical funding in total. The discussion below provides more detail on the funding for English Language Learners and Special Education to address the specific question raised by the JBC.

### **English Language Proficiency Act (ELPA or ELL) (CRS 22-24-104):**

The English Language Proficiency Act funds districts to provide evidence-based English language development programs to enable students to learn English while achieving and maintaining performance. A student who is identified to be included in an English Language Learner proficiency program may receive funding for a total of five budget years regardless of program eligibility and district residency. Funds for the ELPA program must be distributed to districts on a per-pupil basis between two separate funding eligibility categories; students who are identified as Non-English Proficient (NEP) or Limited English Proficient (LEP) who were previously identified as Non-English Proficient or Limited English Proficient and now being actively monitored for support (Monitor 1 and 2). Statute dictates the Department distribute funding between the percentage of students

who are Non-English Proficient and Limited English Proficient (counts certified through the October Student Count Data) and the percentage of students who are being actively monitored. Further, students are eligible for a maximum of five years of funding even if they are identified as NEP, LEP or Monitor 1 and 2 for longer.

The State calculates the number of all eligible students and determines the percentage of the two categories. Once percentages are calculated, those percentages of funds are tied to each category to determine the base level of funding needed to be distributed. A PPR is then calculated based on funding provided divided by student numbers to ensure statutory compliance, as statute dictates that students have to be funded at a PPR rate of \$200 per student or ten percent of the state-wide per pupil rate as determined by School Finance Funding Formula.. Below is an example of how this is calculated using FY24-25 numbers.

Districts are required to code expenses incurred under this program under unique grant codes collected through the annual Finance December Data Collection reporting. Allowable expenditure guidance can be found here: ([https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde\\_english/elpa-guidance#:~:text=The%20ELPA%20Program%20provides%20funding,Program%20funding%20code%20is%203140.](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cde_english/elpa-guidance#:~:text=The%20ELPA%20Program%20provides%20funding,Program%20funding%20code%20is%203140.))

### **FY24-25 ELPA Calculation**

Total NEP/LEP Student Count: 65,461  
 Total Monitored (Monitor 1 and Monitor 2) Student Count: 6,113  
 Total ELPA Student Count: 71,574  
 Total Long Bill Allocation: \$34,602,429

Total NEP/LEP Percentage: 91.46%  
 Total Monitored (Monitor 1 and Monitor 2) Percentage: 8.54%  
 Total NEP/LEP Funding: \$31,647,381.56  
 Total Monitored Funding: \$2,955,047.44

Total Per Pupil NEP/LEP: \$483.45  
 Total Per Pupil Monitored (Monitor 1 and Monitor 2): \$483.41  
 Total Per Pupil: \$812.10  
 10% of State-Wide Per Pupil Average: \$812.10

**Special Education (CRS 22-20-114):**

The Special Education Categorical funding authorized under the State's Exceptional Children's Education Act (ECEA) is provided to support Administrative Units (school districts and board of cooperative education services (BOCES)) in supporting special education programs for children with disabilities. The program breaks down funding between two tiers of students: Tier A and Tier B. Tier A represents all students with disabilities, and Tier B is a sub-set of these students. The criteria for each of these tiers is described below.

**Tier A Eligibility:**

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deaf-Blindness
- Hearing Impairment, including Deafness
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Multiple Disabilities
- Orthopedic Impairment
- Other Health Impaired
- Developmental Delay
- Preschooler with a Disability
- Serious Emotional Disability
- Specific Learning Disability
- Speech or Language Impairment
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment, Including Blindness

For Fiscal Year 25-26 the Tier A funding rate was \$1,882.59 per student for a total of \$225,876,393,

**Tier B Eligibility:**

- Autism Spectrum Disorder
- Deaf-Blind
- Hearing Impairment, including Deafness
- Intellectual Disabilities
- Multiple Disabilities
- Serious Emotional Disability
- Traumatic Brain Injury
- Visual Impairment, including Blindness

For Fiscal Year 25-26 the Tier B funding rate was \$5,797.67 per student for a total of \$157,818,405. Pursuant to statute the amount to fully fund Tier B is \$6,000

Total ECEA funding for FY25-26 is \$383,694,798.

The State is required to calculate funding increases based on the percentage of inflation tied to both Tier A and Tier B students. Administrative Units must receive **at minimum** \$1,250 (adjusted for inflation) for each student in Tier A and **no more** than \$6,000 for each student in Tier B.

Similar to the ELPA program, districts are required to report ECEA expenditures under unique grant codes which are then uploaded and monitored through the annual December Finance Data Collection Collection reporting. Allowable expenditures for the program can be found here:

([https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/compplan\\_modelcomprehensiveplan#:~:text=Expenditure%20of%20ECEA%20Funds,-The%20AU%20assures&text=The%20provision%20of%20special%20education%20services%20as%20identified%20on%20an,of%20the%20general%20education%20program.](https://www.cde.state.co.us/cdesped/compplan_modelcomprehensiveplan#:~:text=Expenditure%20of%20ECEA%20Funds,-The%20AU%20assures&text=The%20provision%20of%20special%20education%20services%20as%20identified%20on%20an,of%20the%20general%20education%20program.))

### **Funding Formula Factors:**

The 1994 formula and the HB24-1448 formula have unique weights for student populations that increase a district's total program funding. Both formulas apply a percentage to the states per-pupil amount to determine the total funding available for these individual weights. For instance the 1994 formula calculates the state base PPR and then applies a weight of 8% to the district's Base PPR and multiplies that by total enrollment. For instance if base PPR for the state is \$1,000 then the ELL PPR would be \$80. A district with a population of 100 ELL eligible students would receive funding of \$8,000 under this formula. HB24-1448 provides a similar methodology but increases the ELL weight to 25% of the base PPR.

For both formulas these weights exist within the total calculations and contribute to the overall districts' total funding, funds are distributed to the districts as a whole and not individually by weight, thus making it difficult to impossible to accurately monitor expenditures. Unlike categorical funding, the formulas determine the total amount of required funding.

All monies received traditionally go to a general fund revenue account at the district level and are distributed based on district budgets and needs. Indirect costs for providing these services can vary and are frequently expensive and traditionally tracked within other expenditure reporting (i.e Para professional salaries, cost of equipment for specialized class rooms, cost of specialized transportation services). Under both individual formulas the department can calculate the amount the district will receive, but cannot report accurately on where the funds are distributed once they have left the state.

### **Differences:**

The categorical's and formula funding primarily differ in how they are calculated and tracked. ELL and Special Education funding under the categoricals are determined by statute and require applying the inflation rate to the previous year's appropriation. Funding amounts can be adjusted as long as the statute is being properly adhered too. The Formula funding calculations determine funding, data is input into the formula and the number that is calculated is the number that must be applied according to statute. Categoricals have caps in statute for funding and the numbers can change, the Formula determines the funding amount and that is currently not capped by statute.

It is important to note that expenditures supporting English Language Learners and students with disabilities exceed the amount of funding provided by State and Federal funding sources. As outlined in the R-02 request ( [CDE - FY27 RFI 1 Categorical Distribution](#) ), the state and federal funding equates to 43.4% of all district expenditures for ELL. Funding for students with disabilities equates to 62.9% of all related expenditures. In other words, districts and AUs are using General Funds, which may come from base school finance funding (school finance formula) and/or local funding sources in order to cover the costs associated with supporting these student groups. The same type of "gap in funding" is true of the other categorical programs as well.

### ***14. Does CDE have estimates for amounts distributed through each formula factor?***

The current "phasing" of both the HB24-1448 and the 1994 School Finance Formula make it difficult to give a total amount of funds distributed through each formula factor line. Below is a table that demonstrates how much the two individual formulas are distributing out each unique factor.

HB24-1448 currently requires the department to calculate total funding under the 1994 formula and then calculate the total amount of funding districts would receive under HB24-1448. Once both are calculated the department then adds 15% of what a district receives under HB24-1448 to the total amount a district receives under the 1994. A district then receives the greater amount of either the 15% plus the original or the total amount of the 1994 formula. Since the total funding is the percentage basis of the total amount of funding, the phased in funding formula does not provide the actual amount of funding for each factor line a district receives. Once the formula is fully implemented the department will be able to accurately report the amount a district receives for each funding line.

FY2025-26 Formula Factors Based on Projected Student Counts as outlined in HB25-1320:

<b><u>HB24-1448</u></b>	<b><u>Amount</u></b>	<b><u>1994 Formula</u></b>	<b><u>Amount</u></b>
Special Education	\$248,672,398	N/A	N/A
ELL	\$163,112,491	ELL	\$65,488,352
At-Risk	\$853,504,608	At-Risk	\$556,571,420
Cost of Living	\$1,438,215,206	Cost of Living	\$143,317,546
Locale Factor	\$162,965,078	Rural Funding	\$34,866,646
Size Factor	\$185,513,057	Size Factor	\$34,285,802

FY2025-26 Categorical Long Bill Appropriations (for reference):

<b>Categorical</b>	<b>Amount</b>
Special Education	\$388,694,798
ELL	\$35,866,264

Categorical	Amount
Transportation	\$72,973,821
CTA	\$32,689,057
Gifted and Talented	\$16,793,762
Expelled and At-Risk	\$9,473,039
Small Attendance Center Aid	\$1,606,548
Comprehensive Health Education	\$1,115,829
Total State Funds FY25-26	\$559,213,118

**15. [Sen. Bridges] Thinking back to the JBC Staff Assistant presentation on ELL last year that showed a lack of correlation between ELL spending and results – does the Department have any comment on that?**

The Department appreciates the Committee's continued focus on improving outcomes for English Language Learners (ELLs). The Department recognizes that more can be done to support Colorado students, particularly those learning English as a second language. Ensuring that all students have equitable access to high-quality instruction and support remains a top priority, and the Department shares the Committee's commitment to understanding how resources can be used most effectively to improve academic outcomes.

In response to the JBC issue briefing regarding *"English Language Learner Funding and Performance,"* CDE would caution against using current expenditure data to evaluate or compare outcomes for English Language Learners for a few reasons:

- **Data Purpose** – As the memo referenced, *"...expenditure reporting is entirely dependent on individual district systems with little oversight from the Department."* This is because expenditure reporting to the Department is primarily intended for financial budgeting, accounting, and reporting purposes.
- **Data Quality** - Because of the administrative burden, districts may not report all ELL-related expenditures to the grant program. For example, one former superintendent recently shared that if they had \$2 million in ELL-related expenses but only received \$1 million in ELPA funds, they would provide detailed level reporting on \$1 million as required for ELPA reporting but would report the remaining balance as general education expenses. How districts classify expenses varies at the local level.
- **Data Specificity** - The categories within expenditure reporting are designed for budget, accounting, and reporting purposes rather than



around student outcomes and, therefore, do not provide granular enough data to make solid conclusions about student outcomes.

The Department publishes insights into how districts are using funding resources at the school level on a per-pupil basis. In the future, as a result of HB24-1448, the Department will start reporting School Finance revenues on a per-pupil basis.

There are a number of other measures the state uses to understand **outcomes for multilingual learners**, including:

- Colorado school and district performance frameworks include the following data:
  - English language proficiency data from the ACCESS assessment for multilingual learners (developed by the [WIDA Consortium](#)). This includes data in reading, writing, speaking and listening. There are five levels of performance assigned to describe students' proficiency. Using the ACCESS results, schools, districts, and CDE can analyze different components of outcomes for multilingual learners, including:
    - The growth students are making in acquiring English compared to similar peers, and
    - Whether the students are on track to reach English proficiency within a designated time frame.
  - Achievement and growth on the CMAS English language arts, CMAS math assessments, the PSAT, SAT, and applicable alternative assessments for multilingual learners as a disaggregated group.
  - Finally, the frameworks include dropout rates and graduation rates (4-7 year).
- The state also disaggregates many other data points, including attendance and chronic absenteeism data. This data provides information about the amount of time students are not in school and not receiving instruction.
- CMAS assessment data in English language arts is also used to monitor the progress of multilingual learners who have been redesignated into monitor or exited status and the department intends to use this data point to inform targeted support.

Rather than relying on inconsistent expenditure data, Colorado evaluates multilingual learner success through robust outcome measures—such as proficiency growth, academic achievement, graduation rates, and attendance—while expanding per-pupil funding transparency under HB24-1448.

In addition, the Department provides a range of optional supports to assist districts in serving multilingual learners (MLs). These efforts are aligned with

our mission to *Serve, Guide, and Elevate* and are embedded in our strategic plan, which places intentional emphasis on improving outcomes for MLs in response to demonstrated needs in Colorado’s student performance data.

## Part-Time Enrichment

### Part-Time Enrichment

Some homeschool students receive all of their education at home (100% home-based education), and Colorado law requires parents/guardians to notify their school district. Districts report the number of these students receiving 100% home-based education in aggregate to CDE each year; however, no public funding is provided for these students.

Some private school and homeschool students augment their education through publicly funded part-time enrollment at a public school (while not defined in law or rule, this is colloquially referred to as “part-time enrichment”). School Finance funding is provided to school districts for these students. These private school and homeschool students enrolled in public schools are eligible for a maximum of part-time (50%) funding.

The pandemic accelerated shifts in how families access educational services, and the pace and scale of this growth outpaced the regulatory framework, which was originally designed for more traditional “brick and mortar” models of part-time enrichment enrollment. Since COVID, the Department has seen sharp growth in part-time enrichment enrollment, new enrichment models, and programs offered through contracted providers. The following table shows the trends in the number of students participating in these programs over the past several years:

	2019-2020	2020-2021	2021-2022	2022-2023	2023-2024	2024-2025	2025-2026	7 Year Change
<b>Part-Time Homeschool Enrollment</b>	<b>8,780</b>	<b>9,654</b>	<b>10,261</b>	<b>12,219</b>	<b>15,713</b>	<b>15,681</b>	<b>18,494</b>	<b>110.6%</b>
<i>Percent Change</i>		<i>10.0%</i>	<i>6.3%</i>	<i>19.1%</i>	<i>28.6%</i>	<i>-0.2%</i>	<i>17.9%</i>	

*(Note: The 2025-26 data is preliminary and will change prior to finalization. Further, exact data is challenging as districts may or may not properly code students as part-time enrichment.)*

While the Department wants to ensure that innovative models can be supported and funded appropriately, it is equally important that programs generating public school finance dollars operate within the guardrails that apply to public education. The State Board of Education took an initial step in this direction through its May

2024 revisions to the school finance rules, which included additional expectations for part-time enrichment programs, particularly those delivered through contracted providers.

The changes took effect during the 2024-25 school year, and as the Department works to better understand the impact of those changes there are several factors that make it challenging to obtain a clear and timely picture:

1. **Data Limitations** – It is difficult to identify the scope and impact of growth in this space. While the Department requires districts to identify both part-time enrollment and contract services in the October Count data collection, the Department is aware of significant data quality issues with self-reported data. For example, in the October Count for the 2024-25 school year, only 11 districts reported enrolling part-time, contracted enrichment students for a total of 317 students statewide. However, district responses to audit questionnaires and subsequent audit findings demonstrated that the actual number was substantially higher. Post-audit data for the 2024-25 school year suggest that:
  - 90 districts and BOCES reported providing educational services offered in the same learning environment as full-time public school students
  - 22 districts and BOCES reported providing a part-time enrichment program run by the district or BOCES
  - 13 districts and BOCES reported having contractual services for part-time enrichment programs.
2. **Data Delays** – Because most of the Department's information comes through the audit process, it is not only incomplete, it is also relatively delayed. The Department's current audit capacity allows it to conduct an audit of selected districts – rather than all districts – each school year. During these audits the Department reviews information and documentation on course schedules, instructional hours, and attendance for a small, representative sample of students. To allow more timely identification of evolving practices, the Department has modified its audit schedule. Previously, the Department would audit five years' worth of enrollment data, but is now auditing one year's worth of enrollment data across more districts. The Department is in the process of validating the 2025-26 Student October Count submissions and will begin the audit process shortly.

3. **Complex Statutory Structure** - There is currently limited statutory guidance that directly addresses part-time enrichment programs. Only two statutes relate to this work and they do not establish a comprehensive framework. One statute allows homeschool students who “*attend[] a public school for a portion of the school day*” to generate funding under the School Finance Act (C.R.S. § 22-33-104.5(6)(a)). The second statute says “*student enrichment programs*” are eligible for for a school code. (C.R.S. § 22-54-119(4), added in 2022). While some districts and schools operate these programs “in house,” other districts appear to rely on their general authority to contract with other entities for educational services (C.R.S. § 22-32-122). Under this statute, contracted services are expected to be comparable to, and meet the same requirements that would apply to, the district itself. BOCES and charter schools have similar contracting authority under separate statutes. At the same time, state law does not clearly outline how the Department or the State Board should determine whether contracted enrichment programs meet these expectations.
4. **Auditing Scope** – The scope of CDE’s current audit processes is designed to verify enrollment, scheduled instructional hours, and attendance — not quality of content or instruction. It is important to note that the audit process is designed to evaluate funding eligibility – it does not evaluate quality or comparability. The Department has other tools, processes, and procedures to evaluate public schools across the state and their alignment to Colorado Academic Standards – such as CMAS scores, performance frameworks, and accreditation; however, those tools do not apply to students participating in part-time enrollment programs.

Data from the annual October Count is not validated until early January, and the Department is still in the early stages of reviewing this school year’s preliminary, self-reported enrollment data, and will share these early observations with the State Board of Education. Over the next few months, the Department will work with the State Board to determine where they believe additional clarity may be needed — and whether that can be accomplished through future State Board rulemaking or through statutory changes. As we analyze the new data and move through the audit cycle, we expect to develop a more complete understanding of both the scope of this continued growth and whether the current guardrails are sufficient to ensure consistency and comparability across program models.

The response below addresses two committee member’s questions on this front:

**16. [Rep. Taggart] Does the money flow to parents or districts? Discuss the flow of funds, the use of contractors, etc.**

Responses are combined in response to question #17.

**17. [Rep. Sirota] Can these programs be online? Clarify the different types of models CDE is seeing for this programs.**

Part-time enrichment funding always flows to the district that reported the student for purposes of the October Student Count; however, the district may not necessarily be providing the educational services for those students. The flow of funding from the district to the entity ultimately providing educational services depends on the type of program. There are various types of part-time enrichment programs across the state, and every district's approach (if they offer a part-time enrichment program) is unique. Generally, there are four scenarios that the Department has observed:

- “Brick & Mortar” Public School Courses
- Enrichment Programming in a Public School Setting
- Online Public School Courses
- Contracted Enrichment Programs

The table below provides more details on each type.

### Part-time Enrichment “Flow of Funding” Scenarios

Scenario	Examples	Educational Service Provider	CDE’s Observations Re: “Flow of Funding”
<b>“Brick &amp; Mortar” Public School Courses</b>	A private or a homeschool student enrolls in and attends one or more courses as a part-time student at the public school. These are courses the school already offers to full-time enrolled students, such as advanced math, chemistry, band, orchestra, or French.	The Local Education Provider	The funding flows to and generally remains at the district.
<b>Enrichment Programming in a Public School Setting</b>	A private or a homeschool student enrolls in a district-designed program where students come to a district campus to receive "enrichment" opportunities like art and music. These programs are primarily designed for students to get socialization time.	The Local Education Provider	The funding flows to and generally remains at the district.
<b>Online Public School Courses</b>	A private or a homeschool student enrolls in and attends an online course or courses offered through a district that operates an authorized single-district online school or program (SDOL) or multi-district online (MDOL) school.	The authorized online service provider	The funding flows to the district, which may retain some administrative overhead before paying an online service provider that operates its authorized online program.
<b>Contracted Enrichment Programs</b>	A private or a homeschool student enrolls in a district, and the district then contracts educational services to a third party. This could include:	The third-party educational service provider or its	The funding flows to the district, which may retain some administrative overhead before outsourcing educational services to a third-party

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• A third-party, non-public educational service provider such as a private school or non-profit; or</li> <li>• A third-party contracted educator.</li> </ul> <p>To specifically address Representative Sirota's question regarding online programs: These courses could be offered in either an "in-person" or an online setting, but typically, these opportunities are designed for private or homeschool enrichment only and are not available to full-time public school students.</p>	subcontractor	<p>provider. In some cases, the district may provide money to a BOCES, and the BOCES may outsource the services to a third party.</p> <p>Recent audits have revealed that third-party providers may then issue a subcontract for services. The Department is aware of instances where a sub-contractor has then issued another sub-contract.</p> <p>Specific to Representative Taggart's question re: parents, the Department has observed instances in which microschools have been contracted as a third-party educational service provider. In these instances, a parent of some of the students at the microschool is the educator.</p>
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## CDE: Additional Department Written-only Response Questions

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### R5 READ ACT Evaluation

*[Sen. Bridges]*

**18. What data will be lost by switching to a bi-annual evaluation of district-by-district implementation of the READ act? How will trend lines be affected?**

Per statute, the Department is required to prepare two different READ Act Reports annually:

1. ***The READ Act Annual Legislative Report*** - The Department prepares this report that summarizes quantitative data collected annually in the spring through the READ Collection in CDE's Data Pipeline. The report also provides an overview of accomplishments since the law was passed in May of 2012. This remains unchanged.
2. ***The READ Act Independent Evaluation*** - This report is prepared by an independent, third-party evaluator to identify and assess strategies that the state, local districts, and schools have taken to support Colorado students in achieving proficiency in reading pursuant to C.R.S. 22-7-1208 (8). In 2019, West Ed was chosen as the vendor to support this work and complete the evaluation through 2025. The independent, third-party report uses a mixed method of both quantitative data and qualitative data to evaluate the READ Act and make recommendations to the Department for improvements to its statewide administration of the READ Act. The third-party evaluator uses the same quantitative data used by the Department in the READ Act Annual Legislative Report referenced above, and provides deeper quantitative and qualitative analysis of the data. This analysis includes things like trend data on fluctuations in Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) rates, along with the proportion of students on READ plans, disaggregated by grade level and demographics, as well as the relationship between SRD and 3rd Grade ELA CMAS. In addition to the quantitative analysis, they also collect and evaluate qualitative data on the READ Act implementation through surveys and on-site visits of



administrators, teachers, and parents at approximately 20 schools each year.

The Department proposes, and the State Board of Education has approved, shifting the READ Act independent evaluation to take place every other year, rather than annually. ***It is important to note two things:***

- 1. There would be no changes to the READ Act Legislative Report.***
- 2. There would be no changes to school and district data reporting – the Department will continue to require that schools and districts report the same data they do now, on an annual basis.***

The Department plans to conduct a deeper analysis of the quantitative data on “off-years” when a third-party evaluator report is not available but would not be able to replicate a similar type of qualitative analysis.

The qualitative implementation data provides CDE insights into the technical and instructional training needs of schools and districts, allowing the Department to be more responsive to improving student reading outcomes. The Department also uses the qualitative data to design supports for the field. ***The Department, therefore, does not recommend going more than two years without a third-party evaluation, so as to have fresh qualitative and quantitative information for program improvement.***

***19. How have LEP’s used annual READ act evaluations to inform instructional planning and decisions in the past? How will this system be disrupted by switching to a bi-annual evaluation?***

The annual READ Act report that is prepared by the Department will remain in place, and schools and districts will continue to collect, report, and independently analyze their individual READ Act data. The only change will be to conduct a third-party evaluation every other year rather than every year.

***It is important to note that the third-party evaluation is not designed to – nor does it – provide district-specific insights for their individual planning purposes.*** The evaluation is primarily designed to advise CDE on adjustments that may be required to the Department’s implementation of the READ Act and services to the field.

As a result, the evaluation provides CDE with a quantitative analysis aggregated and reported at the statewide level, and relies on qualitative data collected from a sample of sites (approximately 15 schools annually) rather than all 178 districts.

Although the third-party evaluation data is reported statewide, the report is available to LEPs and the Dyslexia Working Group, and they may use it alongside their local data analysis to drive their work and inform instructional decisions.

***20. How many Colorado students are meeting CMAS ELA standards in the 3rd grade? Has that number improved since implementation of the READ Act?***

We continue to see incremental improvements on the 3rd-grade CMAS. Specifically, the 3rd-grade CMAS ELA proficiency rate in 2025 was 42% compared to 41.3% in 2019.

Because Colorado has changed its academic standards and assessments over time, direct comparisons of student performance before and after the READ Act's implementation in 2012–13 are not possible. At that time, the state administered the Transitional Colorado Assessment Program (TCAP), which measured the former Colorado Model Content Standards. Those results are not directly comparable to today's Colorado Measures of Academic Success (CMAS) assessments, which are aligned to the current Colorado Academic Standards and began in 2015. More recent comparisons are made challenging by the impact of the COVID-19 school disruptions, which impacted scores in more recent years. Notably, scores have recovered and are now exceeding scores from 2019.

Comparisons can be made with the initial implementation years of CMAS. In 2015, the first year CMAS ELA was administered, 38.2% of Colorado's third graders—23,954 students—met or exceeded expectations. In 2025, 42.0% of third graders—23,759 students—met or exceeded expectations in ELA. With fewer students enrolled in third grade in 2025 than in 2015, this represents an improvement from the first year of CMAS implementation.

Another important data point to consider is how students are progressing on the Early Literacy Assessment Tool (ELAT). This assessment screens for deficiencies in reading alone, whereas CMAS assesses reading and writing summatively. Although not a complete state dataset, nearly 60% of districts use Amplify DIBELS 8 to screen for significant reading deficiencies and track

progress on reading proficiencies. For the second year in a row, Colorado's end-of-year ELAT scores for moving students into "at or above benchmark" outpaced the national scores by 6%. The thick black box on the table below shows this comparison.

## Common question For Department Hearings (Written-only Response)

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(PLEASE RETAIN THE NUMBERING IN ORDER TO MAINTAIN CONSISTENT LABELING ACROSS DEPARTMENTS.)

**1. Please provide a breakdown of your department's total advertising budget for the current and prior fiscal year. Specifically:**

**a. What is the total amount budgeted and expended on advertising and media placement type?**

In the past, the Department, on an as-needed basis, has spent minimal on advertising open positions to support the recruitment of qualified candidates. In FY24-25 it was ~\$5,000 total.

Beyond that, CDE's expenditures on paid media (advertising) are in support of statutory requirements related to the READ Act. The department is required to develop and implement a public information campaign to:

- Emphasize the importance of learning to read by third grade;
- Highlight the local education providers that are achieving high percentages of third grade students who demonstrate reading competency; and
- Emphasize the important roles that educators and parents have in teaching children to read and in providing a school and home environment that promotes reading.

The total amount budget for paid media (advertising) in FY25 was \$151,985. The amount budgeted - but not yet expended - for FY26 through 12/30/25 is \$44,200.

It is important to note that portions of this particular campaign were submitted to the Joint Budget Committee as a potential reduction in the FY26-27 budget.

- b. How are those advertising dollars allocated across different media types (e.g., television (national/local/cable), radio (terrestrial vs streaming), SEM, digital (display, YouTube), connected TV, social media, print, outdoor, etc.)?**
- c. How much of that spending is directed to Colorado-based or local media outlets? How is the media currently purchased?**

The table below provides a detailed breakdown of spend allocation and the location of each outlet.

- All media for FY25 and FY26 is purchased.
- For FY25: \$11,788 of the \$151,985 spent was Colorado-based.
- For FY26: all paid media outlets are based out of state

### Colorado Department of Education

#### FY25 READ Campaign

Channel	Media Type	Spend	Location
PlaceBased Media	Printed Materials	\$105,950	Minneapolis, Minnesota
Lantern	Digital Media (Text Messaging)	\$11,788	Denver, Colorado
Entravision	Digital Media (Display)	\$941	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Social Media (Meta, TikTok, YouTube)	\$7,881	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Digital Media (Audio)	\$4,706	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Digital Media (Email)	\$4,377	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Radio	\$16,342	Santa Monica, California
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$151,985</b>	

#### FY26 READ Campaign

Channel	Media Type	Spend	Location
Meta	Social Media	\$7,300	Menlo Park, California
Lantern	Text Messaging	\$12,000	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Social media (YouTube, Meta, TikTok)	\$11,164	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Digital Media (Audio)	\$5,288	Santa Monica, California
Entravision	Digital Media (Email)	\$4,140	Santa Monica, California
Google	Digital Media (Web)	\$4,308	Mountain View, California
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>\$44,200</b>	

**d. What performance metrics or evaluation tools does the department use to measure the effectiveness of these advertising campaigns? What are the goals of the campaigns, and what key performance indicators are measured for success?**

The goals of the campaign - aligned to statutory requirements - are to emphasize the importance of learning to read by third grade and highlight the important roles that educators and parents have in teaching children to read and in providing a school and home environment that promotes reading.

The staff and vendors use standard key performance indicators for paid media, which include:

- Email open rates and click-through rates
- Listen-through rates for audio media (podcasts)
- Social media click-through, reach, impression, and engagement rates
- Impression and click-through rates for display (digital ads)
- Text message delivery and click-through rates

**e. If any portion of advertising is managed through third-party vendors (or 'partners';) or media buying firms, please provide any available data or reporting from those companies on campaign performance and spending. How often do the departments discuss media placements with these vendors?**

The current contract was signed prior to the enactment of HB25-1320, which, among other things, removed the statutory mandate that the Department use a third-party vendor for the READ Act. As a result, all of our paid media is currently managed through a third-party vendor. [This link provides the FY25 year-end report for our work with the third party vendor, SE2.](#) It is worth noting that we are working to bring as much campaign management as possible "in-house" by the close of FY26 - we may still need to use a vendor to support some state-wide paid media purchasing (such as Lantern and Entavision).

The staff involved in this project meet with the vendor on a weekly basis, and the department reviews and approves any proposals for paid media efforts with decisions made collaboratively between the vendor and CDE staff.

**f. Monthly or quarterly reporting - how is reporting delivered?**

The reporting for FY25 was delivered at the end of the approx. five month campaign. The reporting for FY26 to date will happen in January 2026 for paid media efforts from the first two quarters of the fiscal year.





# Joint Budget Committee

*December 9, 2025*



# Agenda

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- ***Introductions & Overview of CDE***
- ***Review Questions 1 - 7***
  - CDE Grants Project
  - SB25-315
  - Potential Next Steps
- ***Review Questions 8 - 10***
  - Proposed Reductions
- ***Review Questions 11 - 17***
  - School Finance Categoricals
  - Colorado Empowered Learning RFI
  - Homeschool & Private School Enrichment
- ***Questions***





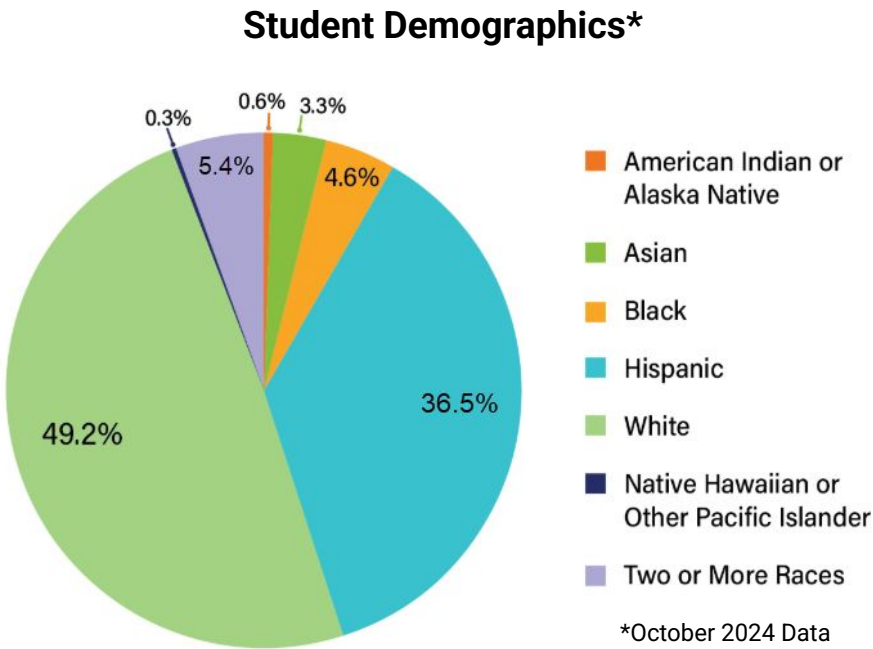
## Overview

# Our schools, students, and educators

178  
SCHOOL  
DISTRICTS

1,927  
SCHOOLS

881,065  
PUBLIC  
SCHOOL  
STUDENTS



\*October 2024 Data

**Eligible for Free/Reduced Lunch:**  
394,765 (~44%)

**Students with Individualized Education Programs:**  
117,616 (~13%)

**Multilingual Learners\*:**  
105,362 (~12%)

**McKinney Vento:**  
14,498 (~2%)

\*Includes both Non-English Proficient and Limited English Proficient students

# A lot has changed over the last year...

MARCH

## U.S. Education Department says it is cutting nearly half of all staff

UPDATED MARCH 12, 2025 · 12:40 AM ET



Trump signs order closing Education Department to 'maximum extent appropriate'

Published March 20, 2025

The directive comes on the heels of U.S. Education Secretary Linda McMahon's decision to gut half the agency as its "final mission."



JULY

Gov. Polis vows to fight for education funds the Trump administration withheld from Colorado

COLORADO **NEWSLINE**

AUG.

Polis calls special session, hiring freeze to deal with anticipated state budget shortfall

Passage of federal "Big Beautiful Bill" drives projected \$738 million loss in state revenues

August 6, 2025



OCT.

Education Department layoffs hit offices that oversee special education and civil rights enforcement

Politics Oct 13, 2025 2:04 PM EDT



Government shutdown threatens November SNAP benefits for more than 600,000, CDHS says

Oct 16, 2025



The federal government is still shut down. Here's what that means across the country

UPDATED OCTOBER 28, 2025 · 3:49 PM ET



NOV.

Colorado voters approve boost to free school meals program

COLORADO **NEWSLINE**

Propositions LL and MM would fully fund program created by voters in 2022

# Our commitment to Colorado schools, educators, and students is unchanged.

Our vision is to create an equitable educational environment where *all* students and staff in Colorado thrive.

To improve student outcomes and ensure students and families across Colorado have access to high-quality schools, we will:

> **SERVE**

Provide actionable support to local educational agencies

> **GUIDE**

Implement policy and legislation in an effective way

> **ELEVATE**

Share the experiences of local educational agencies and students

**Our Core Values:** INTEGRITY | EQUITY | ACCOUNTABILITY | TRUST | SERVICE

## Our Priorities:

Increase Student Engagement

Accelerate Student Outcomes

Strengthen the Educator Workforce

Provide Operational Excellence

# We have set five Wildly Important Goals aligned to our priorities.

## Increasing Student Engagement

Reduce K-12 student chronic absenteeism by more than 50% from its pandemic high of 35.5% in 2021-22 to 15% in 2027-28.

## Strengthening the Educator Workforce

By 2027-28, 98% of teacher positions are filled with educators who either hold (1) a professional teaching license or (2) are in a teacher preparation program, have demonstrated content knowledge in their teaching endorsement, and are supported by a trained mentor, an increase from 94.2% in 2023-24.

## Providing Operational Excellence

Over the next three years, increase the percentage of employees who indicate that the department is proactively addressing the critical factors that impact the employee experience (from a baseline to be set Jan. 30, 2025).

## Accelerating Student Outcomes

1) Increase the percentage of third graders meeting or exceeding expectations on ELA CMAS from 42% in 2024 to 60% by 2028.

3<sup>rd</sup>  
grade

2) Starting with the anticipated year of graduation of 2029, 100% of graduates will have achieved at least one of the following:

- Earned a quality, in-demand non-degree credential
- Earned 12 college credits that count toward a postsecondary credential
- Participated in one high-quality work-based learning (WBL) opportunity

H.S.





## CDE Grants: *Questions 1 - 7*

# Our grant programs meet critical needs, *and* we must strengthen coherence and reduce burdens.

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Our 2024 Grants Project found opportunities for improvement:

- Consolidating grants to ensure more effective, coherent, and strategic supports
- Leveraging existing data to ensure that grant opportunities are not exacerbating funding gaps
- Decreasing the administrative burden for Local Education Providers (LEPs) accessing grants
- Ensuring that grant composition/design allows for data-informed evaluation



**Of the 31 grants analyzed, nearly half are scheduled to sunset, have already been reduced, or have been consolidated.**

1. Accelerated College Opportunity Exam Fee ✓	15. Adult Education Grant
2. Automatic Enrollment In Advanced Course Grant Program ✓	16. Adult High School Program
3. Career Development Incentive Program ✓	17. Colorado Student Re-Engagement Grant
4. Colorado Career Advisor Training Program ✓	18. Comprehensive Health: Education Grant + Student Wellness
5. Concurrent Enrollment Expansion And Innovation Grant Program ✓	19. Early Literacy Grant
6. Computer Science Education Grant / Grant for Teachers ☀	20. Education Stability Grant
7. Colorado High-Impact Tutoring ☀	21. Expelled and At Risk Students Grant
8. Dyslexia Pilot Program ☀	22. Facility Schools Operational Shared Services Grant
9. K-5 Social and Emotional Health Act ☀	23. Gifted Educational Universal Screening And Qualified Personnel
10. Physical Education Instruction Pilot Program ☀	24. Local School Food Purchasing Programs
11. FAFSA/CASFA Completion Grant	25. Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant
12. Colorado Academic Accelerator Grant Program ☀	26. Ninth Grade Success Grant Program
13. Local Accountability Systems (partial reduction in FY 24-25, 25-26 & 26-27) ↓	27. Quality Teacher Recruitment Grant
14. Bullying Prevention And Education Grant (partial reduction in FY 24-25) ↓	28. School Counselor Corps Grant
	29. School Health Professionals Grant
	30. School Transformation Grant
	31. Special Education Fiscal Advisory Committee



Consolidated into PWR Funds



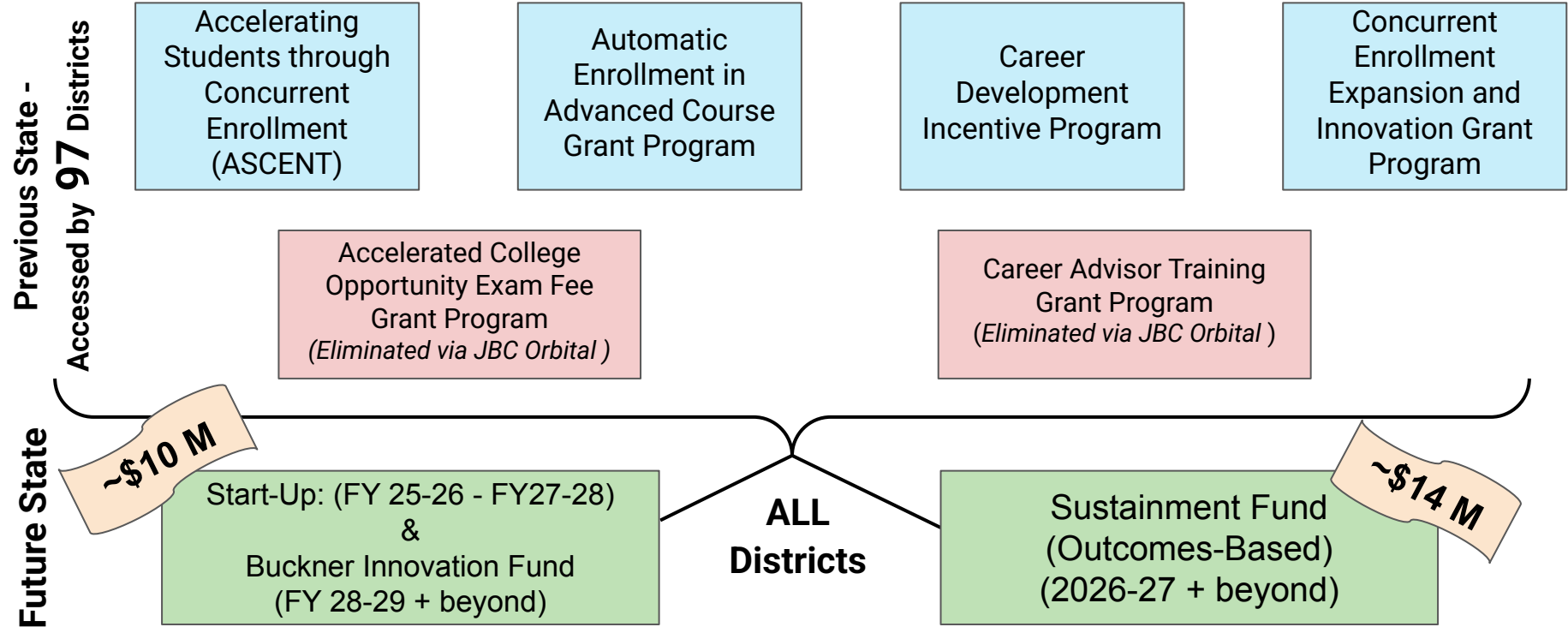
Sunsetted and/or Eliminated



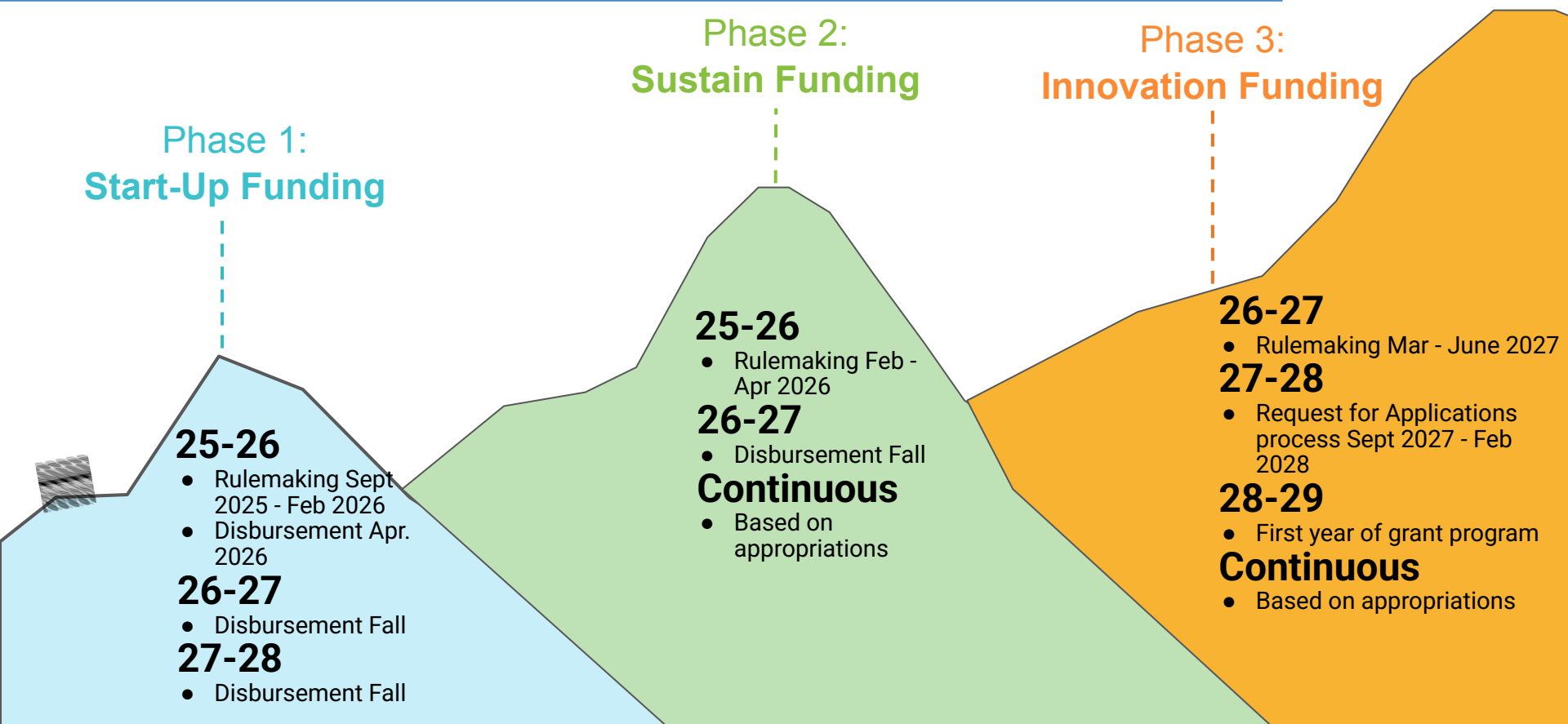
Funding Reduced



# SB25-315 streamlined existing Postsecondary Workforce Readiness (PWR) programs.



Our work on SB 315 is on track for full implementation in 2028-2029.



# The State Board of Education 2026 Legislative Priorities

## We support policy that:

- **Deploys the use of grants and CDE's processes in an intentional, coherent and strategic fashion to better meet students' needs; and**
- **Ensures grant programs include clear and measurable metrics of success and funding for a thorough evaluation and review.**

## Aligns funding with three clear frameworks established by the State Board of Education:

- **Competitive Grants** – Used sparingly and focused on testing innovative ideas or demonstrating new practices that can be scaled or replicated statewide.
- **Targeted Distribution** – Uses data and need-based indicators to direct resources where they are most needed, focusing on building local capacity and long-term impact.
- **Universal/Core Services** – Provides equitable access for all schools and districts through per-pupil funding or shared systems that streamline support and reduce administrative burden. Grant programs are not a sustainable replacement for funding core services.

We are working with our board on an initial proposal to consolidate eight grants into two grants designed to **drive greater impact on the state's highest priorities**

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**“Student Engagement & Academic Success Grant,”** which would include:

1. Bullying Prevention and Education Grant (\$1M)
2. Expelled and At-Risk Student Services Grant (\$9.4M)
3. Ninth Grade Success Grant (\$2M)
4. Student Re-Engagement Grant (\$2M)

**“Healthy Students Grant,”**  
which would include:

5. Comprehensive Health Education Grant (\$1.1M, includes Student Wellness Grant)
6. Student Wellness Grant
7. Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant (\$100K)
8. School Health Professional Grant (\$14.9M)

CDE is determining the best structure to consolidate multiple grants in scope, which will result in a proposal that addresses the following considerations:

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**Eligible Recipients:** Defining which entities are authorized to receive funding under the consolidated structure.



**Allocation Method:** Establishing how funding will be distributed across eligible entities, including formulas or criteria that prioritize need, ensure transparency and equity for all districts regardless of size.



**Timing:** Determining when recipients will receive funds to allow for planning and implementation.



**Allowable Uses of Funds:** Provide flexibility allowing districts to invest resources to maximize successful student outcomes.





## Proposed Reductions: *Questions 8 - 10*



## CDE understands the current budget constraints; JBC staff identified offsets that included reduction, consolidation or elimination of various CDE grants and programs:

- Social Studies Assessment\*
- Science Professional Development (HB24-1446)\*
- Smart Start & Legacy Nutrition Programs
- Adult Education and Literacy Grant Program
- Out-of-school Time Grant (HB24-1331)



*\*Submitted as part of the SBE approved budget*

## READ Act Reduction

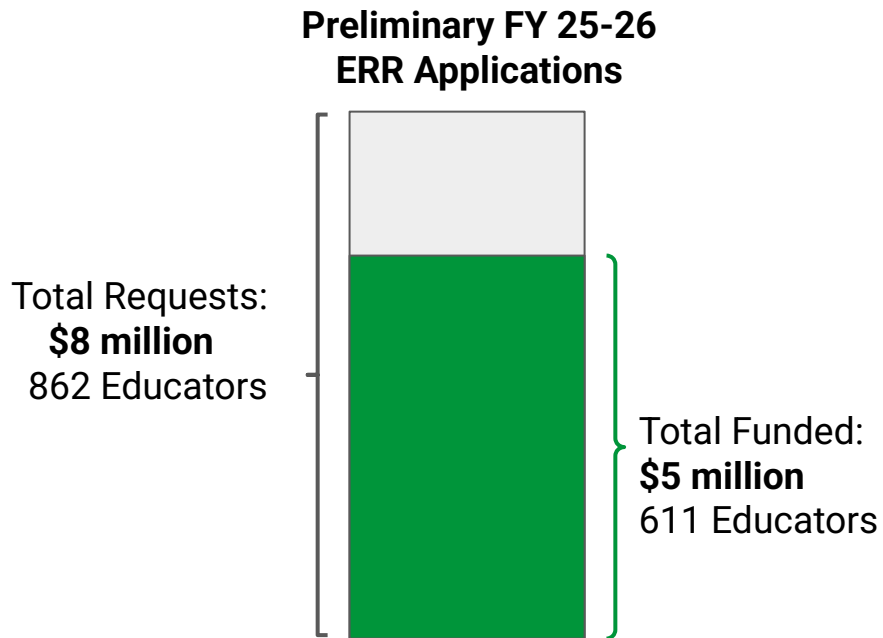
*The Department submitted a reduction...*

- Reduce the total funding for public service campaign ads
- Shift the annual third-party evaluation to every-other-year
- Districts & CDE will still collect and report quantitative data on an annual basis.



# Educator Retention & Recruitment (ERR) Program

*Up to \$10,000 in financial assistance to candidates teaching in a shortage area for at least three years.*



- **81%** of ERR participants continue to work in a Colorado public schools
- Nearly **50%** (1,083 of 2,182 lifetime participants) were from rural or small rural districts
- **80%** of respondents reported they considered dropping out or delaying their educator preparation program before receiving funding through the ERR program and **98%** reported that the financial assistance positively impacted their careers.

# Educator Retention & Recruitment (ERR) Program

*Changes to the ERR Program were identified as a 2026 priority for the SBE*

- *“Seeking board authority to increase and set priorities for Educator Recruitment & Retention funding distribution.”*
- Grant the SBE the authority to adjust amounts and awards based on prioritization (special education teachers, rural schools, paraprofessionals seeking to become teachers, etc.)
- This change would allow CDE to be more responsive to meet the changing needs of the field.



# State Grants to Libraries Program

*Formula distribution for educational resources (print books, eBooks, electronic resources)*

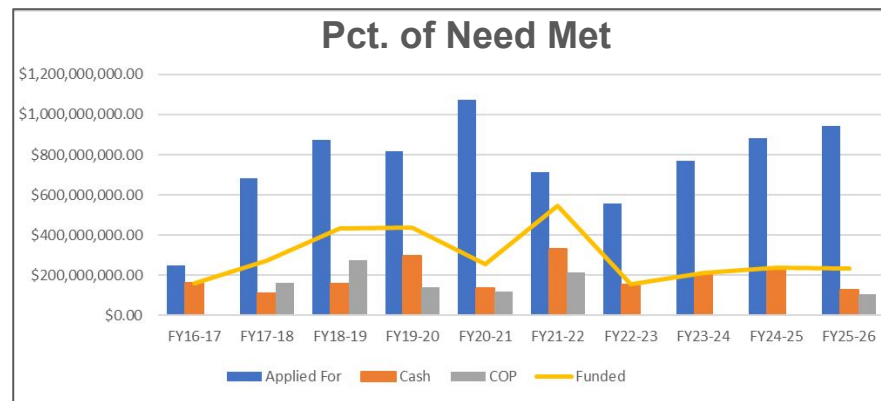
- **313** public & school libraries
- 124 (**40%**) of grantees serve populations under 1,000
- More than a third of all libraries report that this funding accounts for at least **50%** of their collections budget.
- Reductions would range from \$12 (0.2% of the original distribution) to \$20,808 (14.2% of the original distribution)



# HSMA & BEST Indirects – Extreme facility needs outpace available funds

*“We support policy that...supports Building Excellent Schools Today (BEST) funding...”*

*Colorado school districts, BOCES, and charter schools have differing financial abilities to meet students’ fundamental educational needs, including the need for new public schools and renovations or for controlled maintenance at existing public schools so that unsafe, deteriorating, or overcrowded facilities do not impair students’ abilities to learn.”*



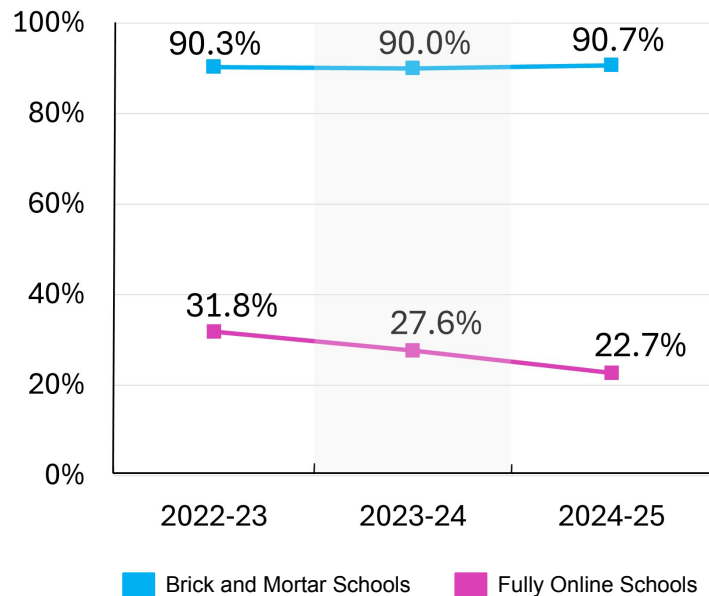


# Remote CMAS Assessments Administration

Established via SB24-070, students enrolled in online education programs will be able to take CMAS online as a remotely proctored assessment

- Spring 2024: pilot and feasibility study
- Spring 2025: full administration

**CMAS Participation: Grades 3-8**



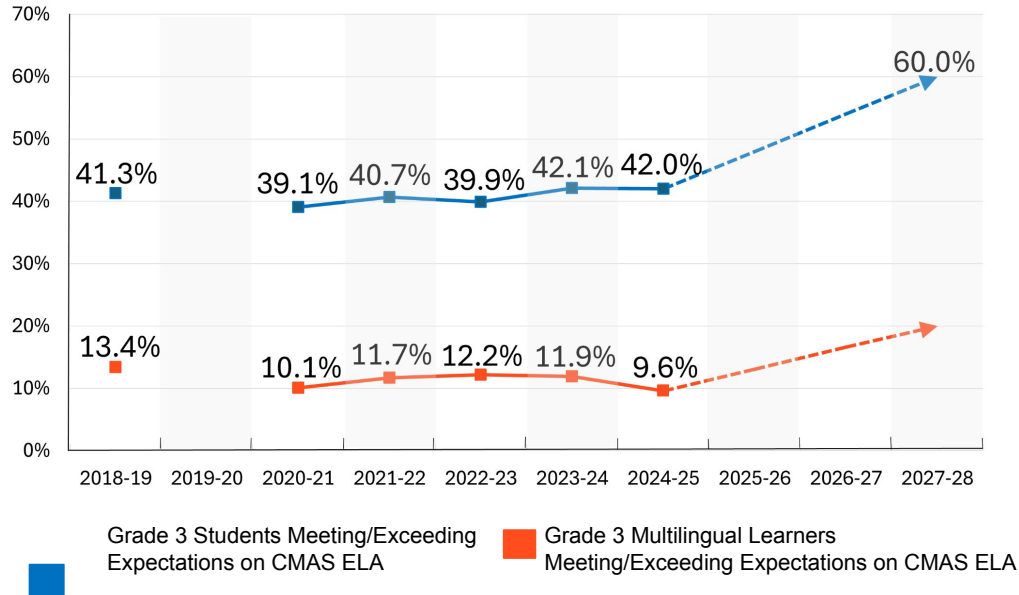




## School Finance: *Questions 11 - 17*

# Colorado can improve outcomes for multilingual learners.

## Percent of Grade 3 Students Meeting/Exceeding Expectations on CMAS ELA



## Measures include:

- Growth and progress to English proficiency
- Achievement and growth on content assessments
- Dropout rates and graduation rates
- Attendance and chronic absenteeism data

# Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS) Growth Overtime

School Year	Total Fall Enrollment	Total Spring Enrollment	Total Student Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2018-19	936	1,035	1,971	-----
2019-20	1,378	1,549	2,927	48.5% Increase
2020-21	3,826	3,739	7,565	158.5% Increase
2021-22	2,427	2,207	4,634	38.7% Decrease
2022-23	2,579	2,459	5,038	8.7% Increase
2023-24	2,242	2,109	4,351	13.6% Decrease
2024-25	1,643	1,894	3,537	18.7% Decrease
2025-26	1,879	-----	-----	-----

# Request for Information: Colorado Empowered Learning

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In the 2024–25 school year, CDLS:

- Served more than **100 districts**
- Approximately **68 percent** of students enrolled from small rural or rural communities
- Enrollment from small rural districts increased by **five percentage points** over the prior year, reflecting continued need in areas where teacher shortages and small cohort sizes limit local course offerings.
- *Despite sustained participation and demand, neither the Department and Colorado River BOCES do not currently have access to student-level data that would allow for evaluation of outcomes or program effectiveness.*

# Total Enrollment - Online Schools and Programs

School Year	Total Online Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2018-19	21,246	-----
2019-20	22,448	5.7% Increase
2020-21	32,034	42.7% Increase
2021-22	31,382	2.0% Decrease
2022-23	30,799	1.9% Decrease
2023-24	31,839	3.4% Increase
2024-25	33,629	5.6% Increase
2025-26	*Enrollment count is finalized in January 2026	-----

## Part-time homeschool enrichment has increased significantly.

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Student Group	19-20	20-21	21-22	22-23	23-24	24-25	25-26	7 Year Change
Part-Time Homeschool	8,780	9,654	10,261	12,219	15,713	15,681	18,494	<b>110.6%</b>
% Change From Prior Year		10.0%	6.3%	19.1%	28.6%	-0.2%	17.9%	

## Part-Time Enrichment Flow of Funding Scenarios

Scenario	Examples	Educational Service Provider	CDE's Observations Re: "Flow of Funding"
"Brick & Mortar" Public School Courses	Homeschool student enrolls in and attends one or more courses as a part-time student at the public school.	District	Flows to and generally remains at district
Enrichment Programming in a Public School Setting	Homeschool student enrolls in an on campus in-person district-designed program where students receive "enrichment" opportunities.	District	Flows to and generally remains at district
Online Public School Courses	Homeschool student enrolls/attends online courses offered through a district that operates an authorized single-district online school or program (SDOL) or multi-district online (MDOL) school.	Authorized online service provider	Flows to the district which may retain some administrative overhead before paying the authorized online program service provider.
Contracted Enrichment Programs	<p>Homeschool student enrolls in a district, the district then contracts educational services to a third party such as a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Non-public educational service provider (private school or non-profit); or</li> <li>• Contracted educator.</li> </ul>	Third-party educational service provider or its subcontractor	Flows to the district, which may retain some administrative overhead before outsourcing educational services to a third-party provider. In some cases, the district may provide money to a BOCES, and the BOCES may outsource the services to a third party.





## Questions



## Appendix to CDE Responses

## State Grant to Libraries

<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>Authorized by C.R.S. 24-90-401, the State Grants to Publicly Supported Libraries is a tiered formula grant that distributes funding to school and public libraries across the state to purchase educational resources (print books, eBooks, electronic resources) for Coloradans to access. More than a third of all libraries report that this funding accounts for at least 50% of their collections budget.</p> <p>Additionally, a portion of this funding is used to meet the state's maintenance-of-effort requirements to unlock more than \$3 million in federal funding from the Institute of Museum and Library Services (IMLS) through the Grants to States program.</p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$2,997,485
<b>Competitive?</b>	No
<b>Amount Requested in the Most Recent Round</b>	State Grants to Libraries is distributed on a tiered basis, using a per capita formula
<b>Eligibility</b>	Public library jurisdictions, academic institutions, and school districts
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	Annual
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	July 1, 2026 - June 30, 2027
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	313
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	<p>Of the public libraries receiving funds, 124 (40%) serve populations under 1,000, and of those, 88 have populations under 500.</p> <p>Of school district grantees, 110 of 111 small rural districts and 34 of 35 rural districts were awarded funds.</p>

## 2.c. School Bullying Prevention Grant

<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>The Colorado School Bullying Prevention and Education Grant Program (BPEG) is authorized by C.R.S. 22-93-101 to provide funding to reduce the frequency of bullying incidents. This includes:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"><li>1) Implementing evidence-based bullying prevention practices with fidelity;</li><li>2) Family and community involvement in school bullying prevention strategies;</li><li>3) Adopting specific policies concerning bullying education and prevention;</li><li>4) Using data to effectively problem solve local bullying concerns;</li><li>5) Developing/Adopting a team at each school to lead the bullying prevention efforts; and</li><li>6) Developing and including student voice in bullying prevention efforts.</li></ol>
<b>Amount</b>	\$1,000,000
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent round</b>	The total amount requested in 2024-25 was \$1,919,291.91
<b>Eligibility</b>	Districts, Schools, Charter Schools, The Charter School Institute & BOCES
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	3 years
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	2028-29 School Year
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	22 grantees
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	12 of the 22 grantees (55%) were rural or small rural Local Education Providers

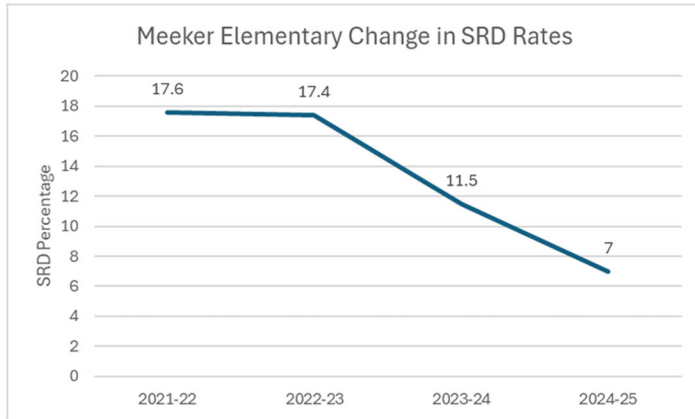
## 2.d. Early Literacy Grants

	Early Literacy Grants include Comprehensive, Sustainability, and Professional Development. C.R.S. 22-7-1211
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>The Early Literacy Grants support districts and schools in implementing high-quality, evidence-based literacy practices aligned to the READ Act. Their purpose is to ensure all K–3 students receive the instruction and intervention needed to become proficient readers.</p> <p><b>The Early Literacy Grants (ELGs) are a proven concept within the READ Act</b> for decreasing the number of students with Significant Reading Deficiencies (SRD) and increasing performance on the CMAS. Year over year, the annual evaluation of the READ Act comes back with survey analysis stating that the most impactful support received is through the ELGs. Of the 22 schools that participated in the Early Literacy Grant (ELG) for the 2023/24 school year, <b>63.6% (14) saw a reduction in Significant Reading Deficiency (SRD) from the year prior (2023)</b>. Although ELG cohorts enter the grant with a higher proportion of students identified with an SRD than the state average, their participation in the <b>Early Literacy Grant leads to a larger decrease in SRD identification rates than what is seen statewide</b>.</p> <p>In addition, schools with ELGs see greater improvements in achievement at a faster rate – <i>see the Meeker Elementary School example below this table</i>.</p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$7,500,000 annually
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent round</b>	<p>Cohort 7 Comprehensive ELG (FY24-25)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested: \$5,491,059</li> <li>• Awarded: \$1,790,663</li> <li>• Fulfilled: 33% of the requested amount</li> </ul> <p>Professional Development ELG (FY25-26)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Requested: \$4,552,567</li> <li>• Awarded: \$1,125,000 (maximum amount allowable under statute)</li> <li>• Fulfilled: 25% of the requested amount</li> </ul>

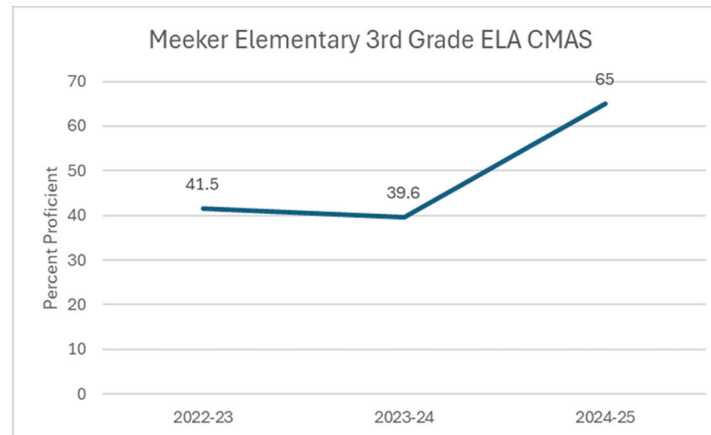
	Overall, CDE was only able to fulfill about 29% of the total funding requested during the last award cycle. Requests continue to exceed the available appropriation, making it difficult to fully meet LEP's funding needs even when strong applications are submitted.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Certain districts, schools, BOCES, and institute charters
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	Comprehensive ELG: 4 year cycle Sustainability ELG: 1 year cycle, only available to those who complete 4 years of Comprehensive ELG Professional Development ELG: 1 year cycle
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	Comprehensive ELG: 26-27 Sustainability ELG: 26-27 Professional Development ELG: 26-27 *Notice for RFAs is open and selection will occur in February 2026.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	Comprehensive ELG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEPs: 19</li> <li>• Schools: 39</li> </ul> Professional Development ELG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEPs: 8</li> <li>• Schools: 52</li> </ul>
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	Comprehensive ELG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEPs: 9</li> <li>• Schools: 18</li> </ul> Professional Development ELG: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• LEPs: 4</li> <li>• Schools: 15</li> </ul> *Approximately half of the grantees are rural



## Meeker Elementary School, Meeker RE-1



## Meeker Elementary School, Meeker RE-1



## Student Pathways & Engagement

	Ninth Grade Success Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	The goal of the Ninth Grade Success Grant is to increase the number of ninth-grade students with the skills needed to successfully reach tenth grade on-track and on-time. Grantees implement four components of the Ninth Grade Success model. Funding is prioritized for schools and districts with low graduation rates and low ninth-grade math performance.
<b>Amount</b>	\$2,007,458
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	\$2,689,000 requested - awarded funds to 26 out of 29 site applications.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Districts and the Charter School Institute apply on behalf of a named secondary school (serving students grades 6-12).
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	2.5 year - Cohort 2 is entering the final year of funding in 25-26.
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	An application for cohort 3 will be run between January - February 2026 for an award that begins July 2026.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	16 districts representing 26 school sites
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	4 of the 16 (25%) districts are rural serving districts

	Student Re-engagement Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	Funds for support to students to maintain student engagement and support student re-engagement at the secondary level. Prioritized for schools and districts with low rates of attendance/high rates of chronic absenteeism or high dropout rates.
<b>Amount</b>	\$2,005,329
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent round</b>	14 applications were received for a total request of \$2,706,444.
<b>Eligibility</b>	Districts and the Charter School Institute apply on behalf of a named secondary school (serving students grades 6-12).
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	3 year - Cohort 4 started a 3-year cycle in 25-26. The current cohort is slated to receive funding in 26-27 and 27-28.
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	An application for cohort 5 will be run in the 2027-28 program year for funding to start in July 2028.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	11 districts representing 18 school sites
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	5 of the 11 districts (45%) are rural serving districts

	Expelled and At Risk Student Services (EARSS) grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>The EARSS program provides funding to provide education services and support services to expelled students, students at risk of being expelled, enrolled truant students and/or students at risk of being declared, or already are, habitually truant, and chronically absent students.</p> <p><i>Note: Even though EARRS is a categorical, it is administered as a competitive grant pursuant to 22-33-205 C.R.S. rather than being distributed on a formula basis.</i></p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$9,473,039
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	<p>Cohorts run concurrently, so the full amount is never competed in one year. Here are the results from the most recent competitions:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• In 2025, 18 applications were received for a total request of \$1,159,496.10. Seven grantees were awarded a total of \$350,000</li> <li>• In 2024, 23 applications were received for a total request of \$1,515,466. Five grantees were awarded a total of \$286,000</li> </ul>
<b>Eligibility</b>	Districts and the Charter School Institute apply on behalf of a named secondary school. Facility Schools and BOCES are also eligible applicants.
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	Most are 4-year grant cycles.
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	There is an annual award cycle, with one cohort of grantees finishing funding and a new group of grantees starting.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	42 districts representing 55 school sites, including four facility schools and two BOCES organizations
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	17 of the 42 districts (40%) are rural serving districts

	Behavioral Health Professional Match Grant - AKA: School Health Professional Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>This grant provides funding to education providers for the following purposes:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• To increase the presence of school health professionals in schools to provide behavioral health care to students who have mental health, substance use or misuse, or other behavioral health needs;</li> <li>• To provide training and resources for school staff on the implementation of evidence-based programming on behavioral health education for all students;</li> <li>• To allow school health professionals to connect students with services that are provided by community-based organizations for treatment and counseling for students who need behavioral health care; and</li> <li>• To provide behavioral health-care services at recipient schools, including but not limited to screenings, counseling, therapy, referrals to community organizations, and training for students and staff on behavioral health issues.</li> </ul>
<b>Amount</b>	\$14,984,818
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	Current Cohort 7: \$22,732,578 Requested from 80 Applicants
<b>Eligibility</b>	Eligible applicants are a school district, a board of cooperative services, and charter schools
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	3 years – the current 3-year cohort (Cohort 7) ends June 30, 2026
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	Request for Applications for Cohort 8 will be released in the Spring of 2026 for funding being on July 1, 2026
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	59
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural</b>	23

serving entities	
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	Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>The Menstrual Hygiene Products Accessibility Grant was created to provide menstrual hygiene products at no expense to students and make products accessible to students.</p> <p><a href="#">It is important to note that House Bill 24-1164</a> made it a requirement for local education providers to provide menstrual products at no expense to students starting in 2026.</p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$100,000
<b>Competitive?</b>	Yes
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	\$68,000.00
<b>Eligibility</b>	A local education provider if it has fifty percent or more students enrolled who are eligible for free or reduced-cost lunch pursuant, The Colorado School for the Deaf and the Blind, and an approved facility school.
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	Yearly
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	2025-26
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	53
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	34



	Educational Stability Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>The Educational Stability Grant program exists to provide grant money to education providers to use in providing academic and social-emotional services and supports to highly mobile students. This funding is intended to remove educational barriers and support educational stability. The emphasis is on the improvement in school attendance; reduction in behavioral and discipline incidents; increase in grade-level promotion; reduction in the dropout rate; and increase in the graduation and completion rates for the grant recipients' schools.</p> <p>"Highly mobile students" refers to students who experience multiple school moves during their K-12 education outside of regular grade promotion, including: children or youth who at any time during the academic year are homeless, as defined in section C.R.S. 22-1-102.5; were in noncertified kinship care, as defined in section C.R.S. 19-1-103; were students in out-of-home placement, as defined in section C.R.S. 22-32-138(1)(h); or were migrant children as defined in section C.R.S. 22-23-103.</p> <p>ESG fosters both academic achievement and social-emotional stability. ESG covers school fees, offers weekly check-ins with liaisons and family/community navigators, strengthens and streamlines access to SEL programs and academic tutoring, and provides basic and essential needs support</p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$1,035,679 per year of the three year grant cycle, based on annual approval by the Department and available appropriations.
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	<p>\$2,234,854.91</p> <p>23 applicants</p> <p>The applicants included:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• five districts designated as rural or small rural</li> <li>• eleven urban/suburban districts</li> <li>• five charter schools</li> <li>• one BOCES</li> <li>• one facility school.</li> </ul>

<b>Eligibility</b>	All Colorado Education Providers are eligible to apply.
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	<p>July 1, 2025 - June 30, 2028 contingent on Department approval and appropriations of funding.</p> <p>Started Year 1 of three year cohort on July 1, 2025.</p> <p>The Educational Stability Grant program Request for Applications can be found <a href="#">here</a>.</p> <p><a href="#">2025-2028 Grant Cohort Summaries</a></p>
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	Request for Applications will be released February 2028 for funding that begins July 1, 2028.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	Currently eight, and one more will be added in January 2026 for nine total
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	Two

	Colorado Nonprofits Out-of-School Time Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>Authorized via <a href="#">HB23-1331</a> this program provides out-of-school time programs to K-12 students who are enrolled in public school across Colorado. Programs funded through this grant must be comprehensive, affordable, evidence-informed and high-quality. They focus on supporting academic enrichment, workforce readiness and increasing student engagement to reduce chronic absenteeism.</p> <p>According to statute, on March 31, 2026 (and in March of each subsequent year of the program), CDE will report to the legislature on the performance of the grantees in this program. However, outcome data for student participants will not be available until after the 2025–26 school year, which is the first full year of program funding.</p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$3,461,979
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	32 applications requesting \$17.9 million total
<b>Eligibility</b>	Colorado nonprofits with at least 5 years experience providing academic enrichment in Colorado were eligible to apply.
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	Awarded in May of 2025 to fund programming through June 30, 2027
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	Currently the grant program ends after the 2026-27 fiscal year per statute - 22-105.5-104(3)(c)(I).
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	Originally projected in the approved grant applications: 11 organizations would serve 112 schools across Colorado.
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	Projected from approved grant applications: 72 rural schools were expected to be served.

	Adult Education and Literacy Act (AELA) Grant
Purpose & Background	C.R.S. 22-10-102 authorizes funding for the AELA grant program. This program exists to provide funding for adult education providers that are members of workforce development partnerships, through which eligible adults receive basic education in literacy, digital literacy, and numeracy that leads to additional skills acquisition, a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate, postsecondary credential attainment, and employment; or education attainment partnerships that assist adults in attaining basic literacy, digital literacy, and numeracy skills that lead to additional skill acquisition, and may lead to a high school diploma or an equivalency certificate, postsecondary credentials and employment, for the participating adults and their children or the children for whom they provide care. Adult education providers often use AELA data to apply for larger funding opportunities through the federal Workforce Innovation and Opportunity Act (WIOA) Title II Adult Education and Family Literacy Act grant.
Distribution Amount	\$2,965,365
Amount requested in the most recent application round	24 applications were received for a total request of \$7,292,897.31.
Eligibility	Pursuant to statute, the SBE shall allocate available funds to the applying secondary or postsecondary, public or private nonprofit educational entity, community-based nonprofit entity or organization, Indian tribe or nation, library, literacy council or literacy institute, business or business association that provides adult and literacy programs either on site or off site, volunteer literacy organization, local workforce board, one-stop partner or consortia.
Grant Cycle	2025-2029
Next grant award cycle	2029-2033
Number of current awardees	8
Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities	1

	School Counselor Corps Grant Program
Purpose & Background	The purpose of the School Counselor Corps Grant Program specifically solicits applications from eligible local education providers for funding to increase the availability of effective school-based counseling within schools. The program goals are to increase the graduation rate within the state and increase the percentage of students who appropriately prepare for, apply to, and continue into postsecondary education.
Allocation	\$12,029,506
Amount requested in the most recent application round	<p>Thirty-eight (38) applications were received for a total request of \$1,867,500. Twenty-five (25) applications were awarded for a total of \$826,944 in 2025-26 for Cohort 15.</p> <p>\$10,800,00 was disbursed to Cohorts 12-14.</p>
Eligibility	<p>Local Education Providers (LEPs) are eligible to apply for this opportunity to increase the number of school counselors for secondary and elementary students and the level of school counseling services provided. Elementary applications must address how early exposure to comprehensive school counseling programs prepares young students for postsecondary and workforce readiness.</p> <p>LEPs are eligible to apply for this opportunity. An eligible LEP is a:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• School District;</li> <li>• Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES);</li> <li>• Charter School authorized by a School District; or</li> <li>• Charter School authorized by the Charter School Institute.</li> </ul> <p>Note: Participating sites included on an LEP's application must have a CDE-issued four-digit school code.</p>
Grant Cycle	4 year
Next grant award cycle	2026-2027

Number of current awardees	177 funded sites in FY2025-26 (sites are individual schools) – so 82 unique LEPs in FY2025-2026
Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities	16

## SQS

	School Transformation Grant
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>Schools and districts on performance watch (i.e. those implementing Priority Improvement and Turnaround plans, or those On Watch) can apply for School Transformation Grant (STG) funds to support leadership development activities, educator professional development, to implement activities geared towards instructional transformation, or to plan or implement one of the restructuring options that state law requires for schools and districts with persistent low performance.</p> <p>Districts and the Charter School Institute apply for School Transformation Grant funds through the Empowering Action for School Improvement (EASI) application. The EASI application was created to streamline multiple school improvement opportunities into a single application and use a needs-based approach to award services and funding. The application braids state school improvement funds (i.e., School Transformation Grant funds) with federal school improvement funds allocated through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to maximize resources available for students.</p>
<b>Amount</b>	<p>The School Transformation Grant received an annual allocation of approximately \$7.1M for fiscal year 2024-25. Because districts apply for up to three years of activities through the grant (for multi-year supports and interventions), each year, some of the annual allocation of \$7.1M is obligated to previously made grant awards. For the 2024 grant cycle, approximately \$7.15M was available for grant distribution for new activities (which spans up to three years of awards). As it has in previous cycles, CDE also made awards in the 2024 cycle for future years, contingent on available funds. The total award of state funds for the 2024 grant cycle, across the three-year period, was approximately \$6.5M. The remaining balance of funds available for grant distribution was reallocated to future grant cycles.</p> <p>\$8,121,243 from FY26 appropriation  The FY2026 appropriation for the School Transformation Grant covers prior grant cohort obligations as well as the first year of the current grant cycle. The prior grant cohorts paid through FY2026 appropriations total \$5.2M and include EASI Cohort 6 2022-23 application (\$210,000), EASI Cohort 7 2023-24 application (\$2.2M), and EASI Cohort 8 2024-25 application (\$2.8M). The current grant cycle for the 2025-26 application will award the remaining \$1.7M.</p>
<b>Amount requested in the most recent</b>	In the 2024-25 application grant cycle, 362 schools were identified under the federal (207), state (83), or both (72) accountability systems, making the sites eligible for EASI federal and state grant funding. The 362 EASI eligible schools



<b>application round</b>	<p>were across a total of 92 districts or LEAs. Since the EASI grant receives more requests than available funding, a prioritization point system is used to rank school and district requests based on the type of federal or state identification and whether or not the site has previously received EASI grant funding. Often low priority schools or districts do not apply.</p> <p>In 2024, 48 district or LEA applications for funding (federal and state) were received through EASI for a total of \$20,980,319. These applications can include requests for funding at both the district/LEA-level or the school-level. An application for one district could include requests for multiple school-level awards. The EASI application braids state school improvement funds (i.e., School Transformation Grant funds) with federal school improvement funds allocated through the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA) to maximize resources available for students. A total of \$7,387,212 in requests went unfunded for various reasons including lack of available funding, CDE service capacity, or low application scores.</p>
<b>Eligibility</b>	<p>Schools and Districts on performance watch (i.e. those implementing Priority Improvement and Turnaround plans, or those On Watch). A total of 155 schools across 54 districts or LEAs were eligible for the School Transformation Grant funding (i.e. state funds) through EASI.</p> <p><i>Note: Broader EASI grant eligibility includes schools identified under ESSA as Comprehensive Support, Targeted Support, or Additional Targeted Support.</i></p>
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	<p>Application opens: September  Outreach &amp; support events: October - November  Application deadline: December  Funding decisions: January  State Board of Education approve awards: February  Districts</p> <p>Each year, districts apply for supports and interventions that, if approved, include a range of 1 to 3 years of total funding.</p>
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	<p>Application opens: September 22, 2025  Outreach &amp; support events: October - November 2025  Application deadline: December 3, 2025  Funding decisions: January 30, 2026  State Board of Education approve awards: February 2026</p>

	Based on the type of supports and interventions for each award, districts will be awarded funds from FY2026 through FY 2028.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	<p><b>Funding Cycle 2024:</b> 48 total awards were made (5 at the district-level, 43 at the school-level) to a total of 30 unique districts or LEAs</p> <p><b>Funding Cycle 2023:</b> 55 total awards were made (5 at the district-level, 50 at the school-level) to a total of 23 unique districts or LEAs</p> <p><b>Funding Cycle 2022:</b> 72 total awards were made (16 made at the district-level. 56 at the school-level) to a total of 28 unique districts</p>
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	<p><b>Funding Cycle 2024:</b> 21 of the 48 total awards were made to entities designated as rural or small-rural by CDE</p> <p><b>Funding Cycle 2023:</b> 15 of the 55 total awards were made to entities designated as rural or small-rural by CDE</p> <p><b>Funding Cycle 2022:</b> 19 of the 72 total awards were made to entities designated as rural or small-rural by CDE</p>

## Local Accountability Systems

<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	Authorized through S.B.19-204, the Local Accountability Systems Grant provides grant dollars and flexibility to local education providers to enhance local accountability and continuous improvement systems.
<b>Amount</b>	\$350,000 (Reduction proposed as part of FY 2026-27 Budget Request)
<b>Amount requested in the most recent round</b>	\$390,000
<b>Eligibility</b>	Districts, Schools, & BOCES
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	3-year cycles. Currently in year 2 of Cohort 2.
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	Cohort 3 will begin in 2027-28.
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	Cohort 2 has 8 grantees – when considering partnerships, this covers about 21 districts and 9 schools.
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	19 of the 21 districts participating through partnerships are considered rural and 2 of the 9 individual schools participating through partnerships are located in rural areas.

## Educator Talent

	Educator Recruitment and Retention Program
<b>Purpose &amp; Background</b>	<p>The program was created in response to ongoing educator shortages across the state and aims to remove or reduce a potential barrier to entry into education: the tuition cost of an educator preparation program (EPP). Applicants can receive financial assistance of up to \$10,000 for the program costs of an educator preparation program in which they are currently enrolled. Applicants agree to teach for a period of three years in an educator shortage area. Funding is subject to repayment if the applicant does not fulfill the service condition.</p> <p>To date, two cohorts have finished their three-year commitment to teach in a shortage area. Of the 824 recipients in these cohorts, <b><i>more than 81% continue to work in a Colorado public school.</i></b></p> <p>To assess the impact of the ERR Program, CDE surveyed ERR Program recipients and local education agencies (LEAs) with at least one ERR Program participant, achieving a response rate of 35%. Almost 80% of the respondents considered dropping out or delaying their educator preparation program before receiving financial assistance. Approximately 98% reported that the financial assistance positively impacted their careers.</p> <p>Approximately 89% of all recipients of financial assistance were enrolled in alternative educator preparation programs. It is important to note that the majority of these candidates do not qualify for federal financial aid, as these programs do not culminate in a degree, only licensure.</p>
<b>Amount</b>	\$5,000,000
<b>Competitive?</b>	Semi
<b>Amount requested in the most recent application round</b>	In the FY 2024-25 application cycle, 862 applicants requested \$6.7 million. After the application window closed and all funds were distributed, CDE launched an interest form on the ERR website to allow candidates to express an interest in future funding. These candidates missed the application windows, or funds were exhausted before they applied. A total of 174 individuals completed the form, requesting \$1.4 million in financial aid. Combined with the original requests by applicants, the demand exceeded \$8 million.
<b>Eligibility</b>	In addition to agreeing to teach in a shortage area for three years, applicants must also meet one of the following

	<p>criteria:</p> <p>(1) hold at least a bachelor's degree and be employed as an alternative teacher or temporary educator eligibility (TEE) educator;</p> <p>(2) be currently employed as a paraprofessional in a school district/charter school/BOCES and working toward a baccalaureate degree as required to pursue a professional teaching license; or</p> <p>(3) have secured a position as a Career and Technical Education (CTE) instructor in a rural district.</p>
<b>Grant Cycle</b>	<p>Application Opens: July</p> <p>Application is open for 45-day intermittent windows until funds are depleted. Funds have historically been depleted in the first window.</p>
<b>Next grant award cycle</b>	Next application will open July 1, 2026
<b>Number of current awardees</b>	<p>660 Educators (2024-2025 grant cycle)</p> <p>As of 11/24/25, 611 applicants have been awarded for the 2025-26 cycle but numbers are still being finalized.</p>
<b>Number of grantees that are rural school districts or rural serving entities</b>	<p>231 (35% of recipients from 2024-2025 grant cycle)</p> <p>1,083 out of 2,182 rural educators were awarded across all cohorts from the inception of the program in 2022 through November 2025.</p>

**JBC Request for Information:**

The department is requested to work with interested stakeholders to review the adequacy of funding for the Colorado Empowered Learning Program. As part of the review, the department is requested to answer the following questions:

1. Assess the growth and demand for the program, including participation trends and areas of unmet need.
2. Evaluate whether additional funding would enhance the availability, accessibility, and the quality of online and blended course offerings and professional development opportunities for educators.
3. Examine how the program aligns with state educational goals, including equity in access for underserved populations, workforce readiness, and student outcomes.
4. Identify any potential barriers to program expansion and recommend strategies to address them.

**Colorado Department of Education Response***Overview*

The Colorado Department of Education (CDE) appreciates the Joint Budget Committee's request for information on the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) Program. In preparing this response, CDE collaborated with the Colorado River BOCES—the entity designated by statute to administer the program—to obtain available information on enrollment, participation, and program implementation. The analysis below reflects the best data currently available to CDE through the Colorado River BOCES and its contracted providers, Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS) and the iLearn Collaborative (ILC).

Created in 2016, the CEL program fills an important role in providing supplemental online courses for students and professional development for educators across the state. Since that time, Colorado's online learning landscape has changed significantly with the growth of multi-district and single-district online schools, as well as expanded local blended learning models — particularly following the COVID-19 pandemic. As a result, CEL now operates within a more complex ecosystem of online learning options while continuing to play a critical role for rural and small rural school districts, which often rely on CEL to provide access to advanced coursework, fill staffing gaps in hard-to-hire content areas, and support professional learning where local capacity is limited.

**Background:**

Originally established through House Bill 16-1222, the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program was created to expand access to high-quality online and blended learning opportunities for Colorado students and educators. The program includes four primary components:

1. **Online Supplemental Courses:** Provided statewide through Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS).

2. **Professional Development for Educators:** Delivered by the iLearn Collaborative (ILC), offering courses and coaching to support effective blended and online instruction.
3. **Open Educational Resources (OER):** Development of OERColorado, a shared repository of openly licensed instructional materials.
4. **Synchronous Online Learning Pilot:** A “CC-Live” initiative connecting licensed teachers to classrooms with teacher shortages through real-time virtual instruction.

Pursuant to statute, the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) — in consultation with the statewide BOCES association — designates a Board of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES) to lead, manage, and administer the program. The Colorado River BOCES was first designated to administer CEL in 2017 and was re-designated in 2022 for a five-year term that extends through June 30, 2026. The Colorado River BOCES receives a \$1.2 million annual state appropriation to administer the program, and then contracts with service providers for implementation.

Following CDE’s redesignation in 2022, the Colorado River BOCES selected CDLS to provide statewide supplemental online courses and the ILC to deliver professional development services. Both contracts run from July 1, 2024, through June 30, 2029, aligning with — but slightly extending beyond — the current BOCES designation period.

Among the various components of the CEL program, **the online supplemental courses offered through CDLS remain the most widely utilized and in-demand offering**, serving students in more than one hundred districts each year. These are individual online courses — rather than full-time online school programs — that supplement a student’s schedule at their local school or district. Students remain enrolled in their home district, which partners with CDLS to provide access to specific subjects or electives that the district cannot offer due to limited staffing, scheduling conflicts, or small class sizes. CDLS employs licensed Colorado teachers and offers more than 250 semester courses across core academic subjects, Advanced Placement (AP), world languages, and electives.

Over time, Colorado’s online learning landscape has expanded to include multi-district online schools (MDOLS), single-district online schools (SDOLS), and single district online programs (SDOPs) authorized under Article 30.7 of Title 22, C.R.S. Many of these programs are operated by school districts under contracts with private education management organizations, which deliver instruction and administrative services on behalf of the district or local education agency (LEA). These models provide both full-time and part-time online learning options for students statewide but differ from CEL in structure, purpose, and funding. Whereas MDOLS and SDOLS receive per-pupil revenue through their authorizing districts and are often managed by contract providers, CDLS operates as a nonprofit, state-supported provider of supplemental courses that expand access for students who remain enrolled in their local districts serving as an equitable access point for districts that lack the capacity to independently operate a full online program. CEL’s funding model is fixed through an annual state appropriation rather than tied to student



enrollment. To help offset costs under the program's fixed state appropriation, CDLS is authorized to charge districts a modest per-course enrollment fee, typically ranging from \$100 to \$250 per student per course.

The current designation of Colorado River BOCES is scheduled to expire on June 30, 2026 and starting in late 2026, CDE will begin preparations for the next re-designation process, as required under statute. The department will review the performance of the Colorado River BOCES and make a recommendation to the State Board of Education on whether to re-designate the existing BOCES or issue a new request for proposals to select another BOCES to administer the program.

**1) Assess the growth and demand for the program, including participation trends and areas of unmet need.**

**Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS)**

Of the four components of the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program, the supplemental online courses delivered through Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS) represent the largest and most consistently utilized element, providing access to courses for students across more than one hundred districts each year. Data provided by the Colorado River BOCES show that enrollment in CDLS courses surged during the pandemic and, while subsequently declining, remains well above 2018–19 levels.

Figure 1-Course enrollment

(Source: [25\\_06\\_CDLS\\_7-year\\_summary+districts.pdf - Google Drive](#))

School Year	Total Fall Course Enrollment	Total Spring Course Enrollment	Total Course Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2018-19	1,082	1,476	2,558	-----
2019-20	1,699	1,689	3,388	32.4% Increase
2020-21	13,235	11,190	24,425	620.9% Increase
2021-22	5,170	4,987	10,157	58.4% Decrease
2022-23	4,203	4,342	8,545	15.9% Decrease
2023-24	3,836	3,885	7,721	9.6% Decrease
2024-25	3,046	3,599	6,645	13.9% Decrease
2025-26	3,804*	----	----	-----

\*As of September 2025

Figure 2-Student Enrollment

School Year	Total Fall Student Enrollment	Total Spring Student Enrollment	Total Student Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2018-19	936	1,035	1,971	-----
2019-20	1,378	1,549	2,927	48.5% Increase
2020-21	3,826	3,739	7,565	158.5% Increase
2021-22	2,427	2,207	4,634	38.7% Decrease
2022-23	2,579	2,459	5,038	8.7% Increase
2023-24	2,242	2,109	4,351	13.6% Decrease
2024-25	1,643	1,894	3,537	18.7% Decrease
2025-26	1,879	-----	-----	-----

Enrollment growth during 2020–21 reflected emergency remote-learning demand. Since then, CDLS has stabilized but is still at roughly three times its pre-pandemic enrollment, suggesting enduring district utilization of the service for targeted course access.

In the 2025–26 school year, CDLS served more than **100 districts**, including **16 new district participants**, with approximately **68 percent** of students enrolled from small rural or rural communities. Enrollment from small rural districts increased by **five percentage points** over the prior year, reflecting continued need in areas where teacher shortages and small cohort sizes limit local course offerings.

Districts report using CDLS to:

- Provide access to **advanced coursework**, including AP and concurrent-enrollment offerings;
- Address **teacher shortages** in specialized content areas; and
- Support **credit-recovery or flexible scheduling** for students needing alternative paths to complete graduation requirements.

CDLS was originally established to provide **supplemental online courses** that complemented students' local school schedules. In recent years, as demand for flexible learning options has increased, some districts have expanded their use of CDLS to support students taking most or all of their coursework online — particularly in communities without other online program

options. This gradual shift reflects changing district needs and the evolving role of online learning within Colorado’s education system, so it is important to evaluate CDLS within a much larger and increasingly diverse online-learning landscape.

There are **44 multi-district online schools (MDOLS)** and **16 single-district online schools (SDOLS)** under Article 30.7 of Title 22, C.R.S. Together, these programs account for most of the state’s online enrollment and serve students across all regions.

*Figure 3*

*Total Enrollment-Online Schools and Programs (as defined in § 22-30.7-105, C.R.S)*

School Year	Total Online Enrollment	Percent Increase/Decrease from Previous Year
2018-19	21,246	-----
2019-20	22,448	5.7% Increase
2020-21	32,034	42.7% Increase
2021-22	31,382	2.0% Decrease
2022-23	30,799	1.9% Decrease
2023-24	31,839	3.4% Increase
2024-25	33,629	5.6% Increase
2025-26	*Enrollment count is finalized in January 2026	-----

Statewide online enrollment increased sharply during the pandemic — rising more than 50 percent between 2019–20 and 2020–21 — and has remained well above pre-pandemic levels. This sustained participation demonstrates that online learning has become a durable feature of Colorado’s education system.

Within this broader context, CEL’s structure differs fundamentally from district-operated online schools in both model and funding. Unlike multi-district or single-district online schools, which function as independent enrollment-based programs generating per-pupil revenue, CEL operates through a designated BOCES that then makes courses available to districts using a fixed state appropriation.

### **iLearn Collaborative (ILC) Professional Development**

The **iLearn Collaborative (ILC)** serves as the professional learning provider for the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program. Through its contract with the Colorado River BOCES, ILC

offers online professional development courses, coaching, and leadership consultation designed to support districts, schools, and educators in implementing effective blended and online learning practices.

Figure 4

ILearn Collaborative Professional Development Course Enrollment

Year	Enrollment totals	Course Completion Percentage
2023-24	910	78%
2024-25	843	73%
2025-26	588	-----

Participation in ILC's professional development courses has remained steady over the past two years. Completion rates range between 73 and 78 percent, and participant satisfaction averages 4.7 out of 5, based on survey data provided to the Department. During the 2025–26 school year, ILC met its goal of serving 15 local education agencies — nine new and six returning — and continues to prioritize support for rural and small rural districts.

In addition to online professional development courses, ILC provides targeted consultation and coaching services for district and school leadership teams. These services focus on planning, implementation, and capacity-building for blended and online learning. Under the current appropriation, ILC provides these consultation services at no cost to districts up to \$5,000 per engagement.

Colorado River BOCES reports that demand for ILC's consultation and coaching services currently exceeds capacity, and the organization maintains a waitlist for districts seeking additional coaching or leadership support. The presence of this waitlist indicates sustained interest in professional learning related to digital and blended instruction, particularly as districts continue to integrate online components into their instructional models.

**2) Evaluate whether additional funding would enhance the availability, accessibility, and the quality of online and blended course offerings and professional development opportunities for educators.**

Ultimately, decisions regarding additional funding for the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program rest with policymakers. The Department recognizes that the Joint Budget Committee (JBC) faces a challenging budget year and will need to make difficult choices in balancing competing priorities. Rather than offering a recommendation, the Department provides the following information to assist the Committee in evaluating any future decisions related to the program.

The Colorado River BOCES currently receives an annual state appropriation of \$1.2 million to administer CEL. While CDE does not have access to detailed provider-level cost structures or expenditure data (such information resides with the Colorado River BOCES and its providers) information submitted to the department by Colorado River Boces outlines that the BOCES retains approximately 6.2 percent of the total appropriation for indirect costs and administrative functions. The remaining funds are then distributed nearly evenly between CDLS and ILC.

Additionally, under the current funding structure, CDLS is authorized to charge districts a modest per-course enrollment fee, typically ranging from \$100 to \$250 per student per course, to help offset delivery costs and sustain instructional quality. Similarly, ILC charges educators \$50 per course for educator professional learning and provides limited consultation to districts at no charge, up to \$5,000 per engagement.

While the Department cannot assess whether additional funding would improve access or quality, available information along with feedback from the BOCES and providers suggest several factors relevant to future considerations:

- **Fixed funding model:** The CEL appropriation has remained constant since FY 2018-19. Because it is not tied to enrollment or participation levels, the program's ability to scale or adjust to changes in statewide demand is limited.
- **Provider capacity:** Both CDLS and ILC report operating near or at current capacity under the existing appropriation. For example, ILC maintains a waitlist for districts seeking additional consultation services.
- **Data and quality evaluation:** CDE does not currently collect student-level data for CDLS or participant-level outcome data for ILC beyond enrollment and completion counts. This limits the Department's ability to analyze quality, measure student outcomes, or evaluate how funding levels relate to effectiveness.
- **Assessment participation:** Students enrolled in online courses typically complete statewide assessments through their home districts, but participation rates in online programs vary, which constrains the state's ability to assess program alignment with academic standards.

**3) Examine how the program aligns with state educational goals, including equity in access for underserved populations, workforce readiness, and student outcomes.**

The Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program provides access to online coursework and educator professional learning opportunities across Colorado. Its primary function is to expand course availability and instructional support for districts that may lack local capacity, particularly in rural and small rural areas where geographic isolation, limited staffing, and small class sizes can restrict available offerings.

Through the Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS) component, the program offers access to core academic courses, Advanced Placement (AP) offerings, world languages, and career and technical education (CTE) pathways that may not otherwise be available locally. Districts frequently report using CDLS to ensure students can take required courses when qualified teachers are not available or when enrollment in a subject area is too low to support a full-time local teacher.

These opportunities have become particularly popular across postsecondary and workforce readiness (PWR) courses, which enable students to complete college-preparatory or career-aligned coursework that supports graduation and credential attainment. Access to such PWR-related courses will remain critical as PWR participation is incorporated into the state's accountability performance frameworks as authorized by HB25-1278 and as additional PWR-outcomes based funding models become available to districts through SB25-315.

Figure 4-Percentage of Small Rural, Rural, and Urban Students Accessing Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS) Courses

	Fall 2024	Fall 2025
Small Rural Students	46%	51%
Rural Students	22%	17%
Urban Students	32%	32%

As shown above, the majority of CDLS participants come from rural and small rural districts, underscoring the program's role in providing access to coursework that may be unavailable locally.

The iLearn Collaborative (ILC) component complements this work by offering professional development, coaching, and leadership consultation on blended and online instructional practices.

CDE's ability to fully assess the program's alignment to equity and outcome goals is limited by two related data constraints:

- **Participant identification:** CDE does not collect student-level data for CDLS; therefore, the Department cannot determine who participates or disaggregate participation by student subgroup (e.g., socioeconomic status, race and ethnicity, disability, or English-learner status).
- **Assessment participation:** Because individual students are not identified, the Department cannot determine whether students taking CDLS courses participate in statewide assessments through their home districts. Without this information, it is not possible to evaluate CDLS's overall impact on academic outcomes or alignment with state standards.

It is important to note that the limitations to fully assess the program are not unique to CEL. Other online learning programs — including multi-district and single-district online schools — face similar challenges, as statewide data show lower assessment participation rates among students enrolled in online settings. As a result, consistent evaluation of outcomes and quality across all online models remains difficult.

Taken together, available evidence suggests that CEL supports broader state goals by expanding access to courses and professional learning for districts with limited internal capacity. However, without identifiable participant data and consistent assessment information, the Department is limited in the ability to evaluate the extent to which the program advances educational equity, workforce readiness, or student outcomes compared with other available learning options.

The Department's ability to further assess these questions is closely connected to several structural and data-related barriers, which are described in the following section.

#### **4) Identify any potential barriers to program expansion and recommend strategies to address them.**

The Department has identified several factors that the General Assembly may wish to consider in evaluating the future of the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program. These factors affect both the program's ability to expand and the Department's ability to assess its effectiveness. They include (1) limitations in outcome data and evaluation authority, (2) the program's evolving role within Colorado's online learning system, and (3) increased demand amid a fixed funding structure.

- **Limited Outcome Data and Evaluation Authority**

At present, the Department does not have statutory authority to collect student-level data from the Colorado River BOCES or its contracted providers. As a result, CDE cannot identify which students participate, disaggregate participation by subgroup, or link participation to academic outcomes. This lack of data limits the Department's ability to assess program quality, alignment with statewide goals, or the relationship between participation and student performance.

To conduct a comprehensive review, the Department and Colorado River BOCES would need the authority to collect and share limited student-level information while also taking the necessary steps to protect privacy. Such authority would enable analysis of student participation, assessment outcomes, and program effectiveness — information that could support any future policy considerations regarding program design or funding.

- **Evolving Role Within Colorado's Online Learning System**

The CEL program—through its provider, Colorado Digital Learning Solutions (CDLS)—operates differently from multi-district online schools (MDOLS) and single-district online schools (SDOLS) authorized under Article 30.7 of Title 22, C.R.S. CDLS was originally designed to provide supplemental online courses to students enrolled in their local districts rather than serve as a full-time online school.

Over time, as demand for flexible online options has grown, some districts without the capacity to establish a district-run online program have expanded their use of CDLS to offer students a substantial sequence of online courses. This shift reflects the program's adaptability to local needs but also creates ambiguity in its role relative to other online models. Clarifying how CDLS complements or overlaps with district-operated programs may help to address how the CEL program model fits within Colorado's broader online learning system and how it can best continue to meet statewide needs.

- **Increasing Demand and Fixed Funding Constraints**

CEL continues to experience consistent participation, particularly from rural and small rural districts that rely on CDLS for course access and on ILC for professional development. However, the program operates under a fixed \$1.2 million annual appropriation that has remained unchanged since 2019. Because the program's funding is not tied to enrollment or participation levels, its ability to scale in response to increased demand is limited. Colorado River BOCES reports that CDLS and ILC are operating at or near capacity, and participation demand exceeds available resources in some areas, such as coaching and consultation services.

The program's funding structure is an important consideration in understanding its scalability. However, because statute requires the Department to designate a BOCES to operate the program, the department does not oversee or manage day-to-day expenditures or the fees that districts pay to access courses and as a result, the Department is not in a position to assess how additional funding might affect, impact or expand program operations or outcomes.

The current designation of the **Colorado River BOCES** to administer the CEL program expires in **2027**, with the re-designation process scheduled to begin in late 2026. As the General Assembly considers a future expansion of the program, it may wish to further evaluate some of the barriers outlined above. If the General Assembly determines that additional evaluation of the program's structure or outcomes is warranted, one potential option could be to 1) authorize the department to extend the existing designation period for a limited time (rather than having the



department start the process for a 5-year redesignation), 2) authorize the Department and the designated BOCES to collect and share the relevant data to support a more comprehensive review of the program and its alignment within the online learning system, and 3) establish clearly defined measures of program effectiveness.

The Department appreciates the opportunity to provide this information to the Joint Budget Committee. As the General Assembly considers the expansion of the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program, the Department remains available to facilitate further requests for information.

## **Glossary of Terms**

- **Colorado Empowered Learning** - Originally established through House Bill 16-1222, the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program was created to expand access to high-quality online and blended learning opportunities for Colorado students and educators
- **Colorado River BOCES (CR BOCES)** Entity designated by statute to administer the Colorado Empowered Learning (CEL) program
- **Colorado Digital Learning Solutions.** Entity contracted by Colorado River BOCES to deliver supplemental online courses
- **Colorado Empowered Learning.** Entity contracted by Colorado River BOCES to deliver professional learning
- **Multi-District Online Schools (MDOLs)**
- **Single District Online Schools (SDOLs)**
- **Single District Online Programs**

**Department of Education**  
**FY 2026-27 Joint Budget**  
**Committee Hearing**

Tuesday, December 9, 2025

1:30-5:00pm

**Charter School Institute**

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***[Staff] Respond to the staff option on capping CSI Mill Levy Equalization.***

Thank you for the opportunity to respond to the JBC staff-identified option to cap CSI's Mill Levy Equalization (MLE) allocation.

A cap would represent a significant departure from statute, which requires the state to equalize MLO revenue for CSI students based on the districts in which they live. The General Assembly adopted this framework to ensure that CSI students are not disadvantaged compared with their district peers. A cap would directly undermine that statutory commitment.

This is only the second year that CSI students have received full equalization. The increases leading up to FY24 were not ongoing cost growth—they were the temporary adjustments needed to close a long-standing gap. During that five-year transition period, CSI students received \$135 million less than students attending district-authorized schools in the same communities. Schools have used the long-delayed full equalization funding to strengthen academic programming, expand student supports, and improve teacher compensation.

Capping CSI's allocation now would recreate the very inequities the statute was designed to correct. It would once again result in two public school students living in the same district—sometimes on the same street or even in the same family—receiving different levels of MLO support solely because one attends a CSI school.

We understand the Committee's concern that CSI's MLE costs are driven by factors outside of the General Assembly's control. CSI is committed to being a constructive partner in addressing those concerns. Last year, we proactively proposed a statutory change to remove multi-district online (MDOL) schools from the equalization calculation, aligning the formula with district practice and reducing the state's obligation by \$1 million annually.

We also proposed an option that would allow districts to choose whether to share the portion of MLO revenue generated by including CSI students in their count. Districts that wish to share could do so; districts that do not wish to share could simply indicate that choice in the ballot language. In FY25 alone, districts collected \$14.3 million from the inclusion of CSI students in their MLO cap calculations.

These proposals reflect CSI's broader commitment to voluntary, incentive-based approaches that respect district autonomy, reduce state obligations where feasible, and continue to provide equitable support for CSI students.

We are actively exploring additional creative and legally workable options that increase transparency, strengthen partnerships, and uphold the statutory and equity intent that CSI students have access to the same resources as their district peers.

We appreciate the ongoing dialogue and look forward to working together on thoughtful, balanced solutions that recognize the state's fiscal realities while sustaining the General Assembly's long-standing commitment to funding equity for all Colorado students.

# CSI Mill Levy Equalization Budget Request

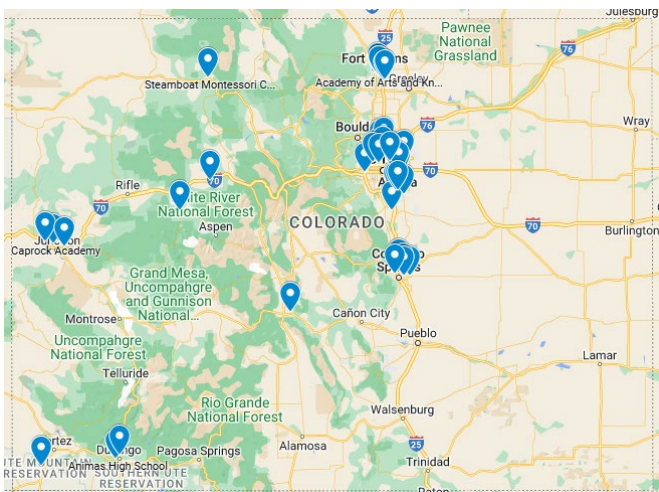
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Joint Budget Committee Hearing  
December 2025



# CSI Overview

20K  
students



47  
schools

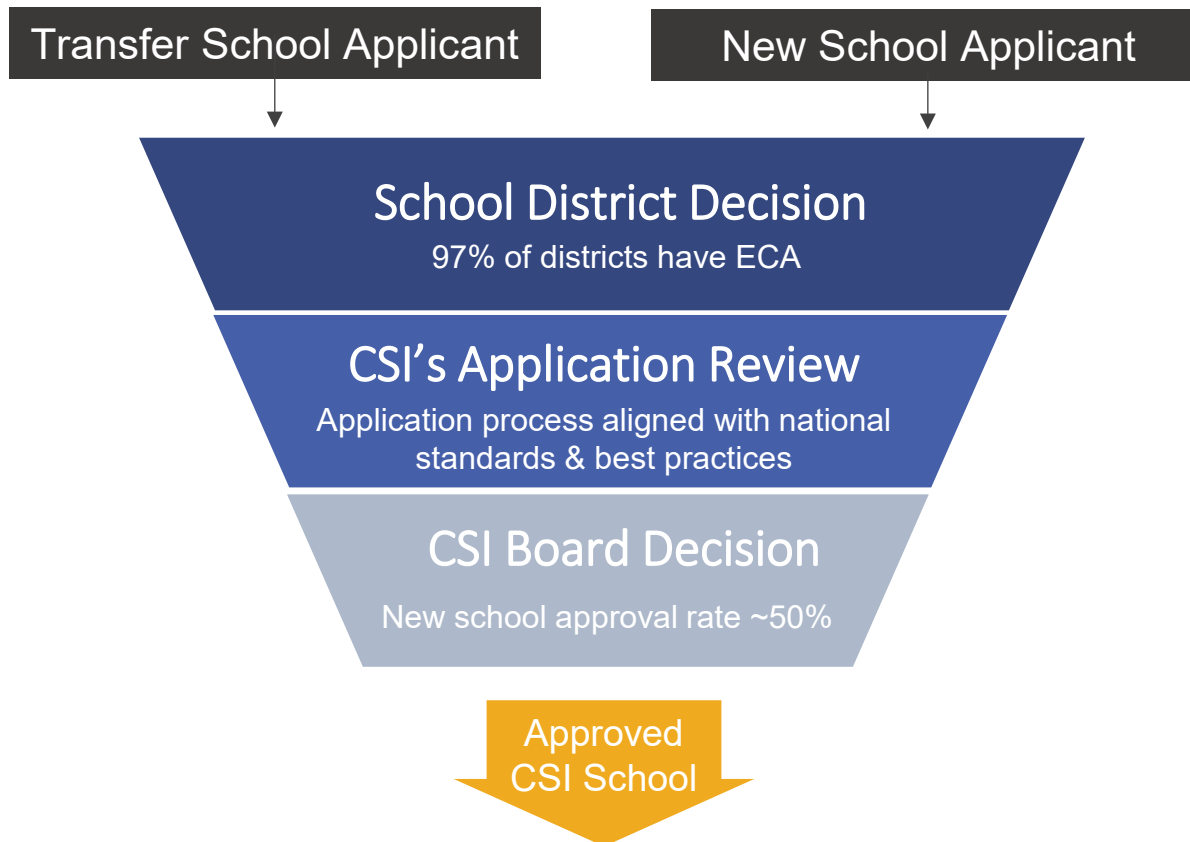


17  
models

75% of CSI schools are Performance rated



# Applying to CSI





# CSI's Portfolio Dynamics

CSI's portfolio continues to evolve.



**New Schools**  
in underserved  
areas

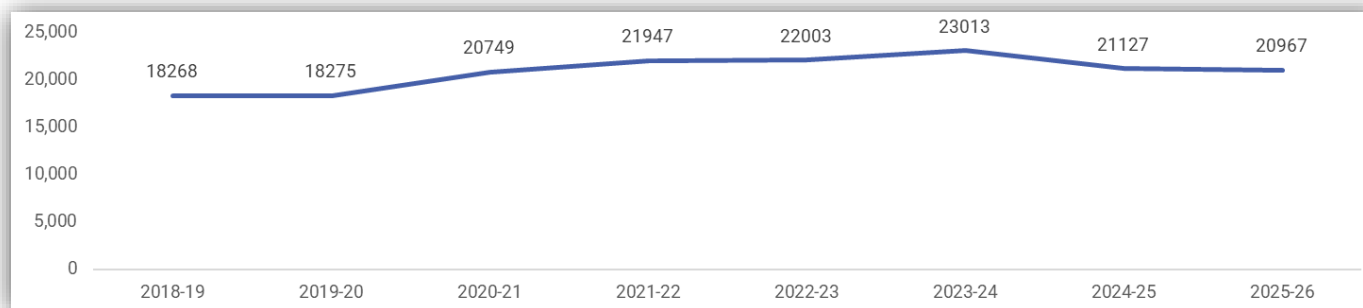


**Expansions &  
Replications**  
of high-performing models



**Closures & Transfers**  
When performance  
expectations aren't met

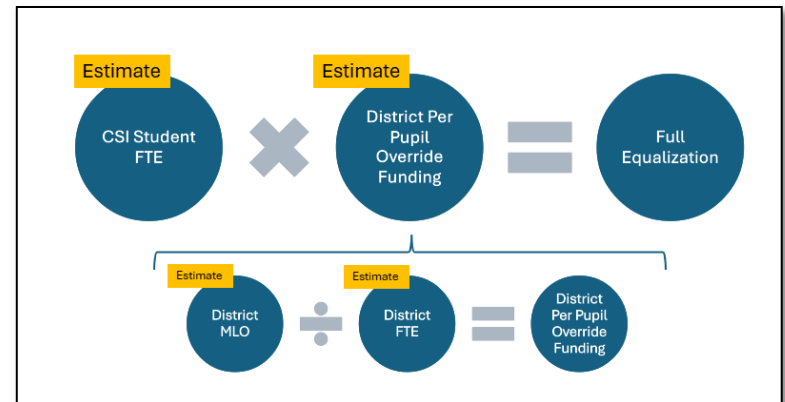
CSI's enrollment has remained steady despite portfolio changes.





# Budget Request

**The Governor's November 1<sup>st</sup> budget included \$49.7M for CSI Mill Levy Equalization and was based on best estimates at the time.**



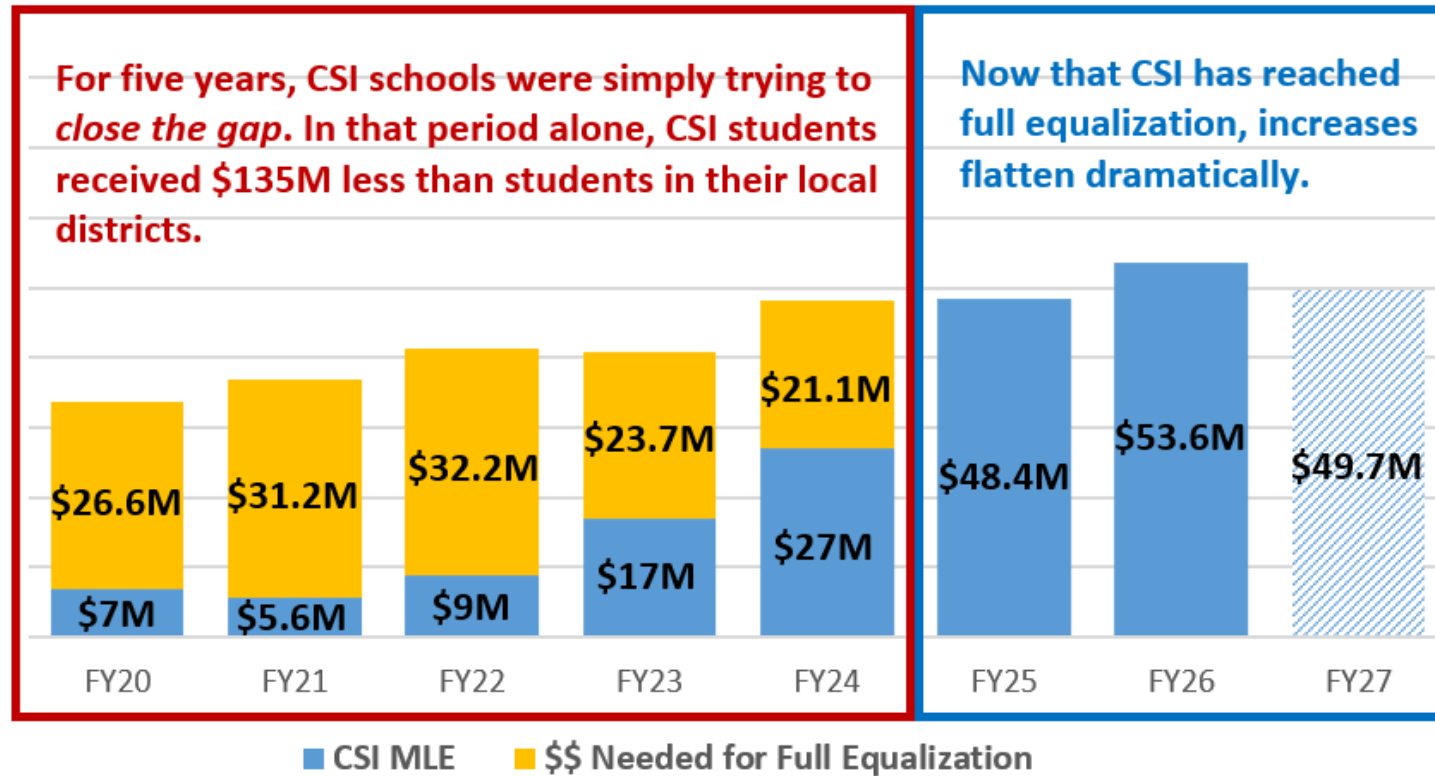
**By January, the MLE estimate will be updated to reflect:**

- FY27 CSI enrollment projection
- Recently passed MLOs
- Per pupil MLO based on FY26 district enrollment





# CSI MLE Over Time

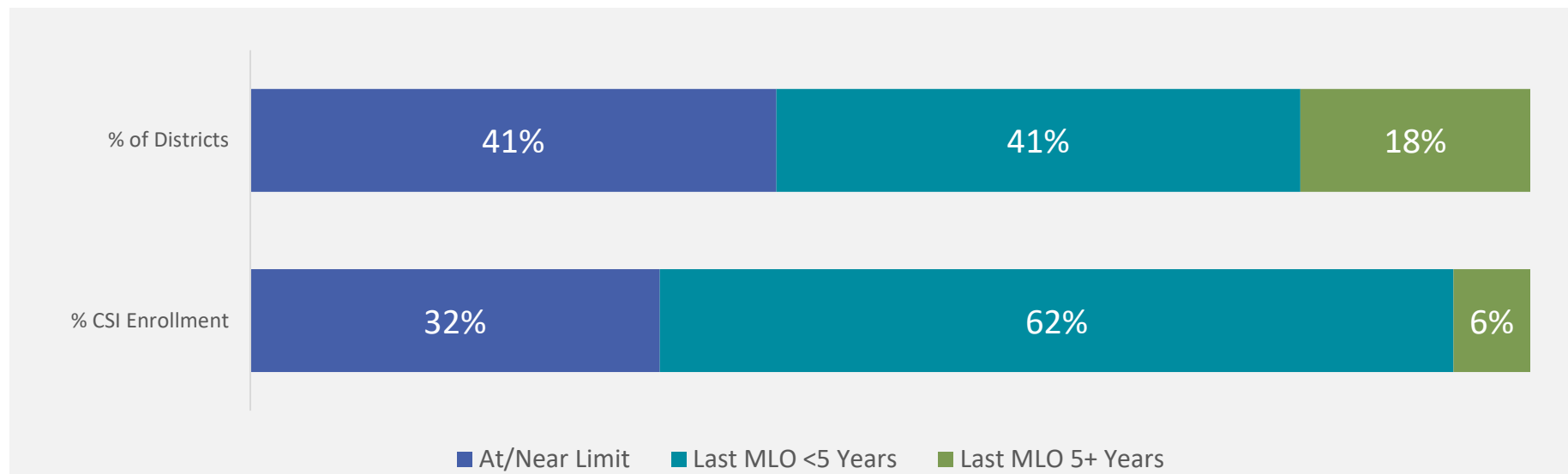
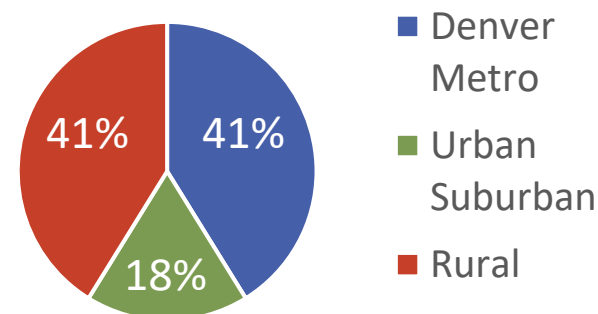




# District MLO Capacity Varies

Districts vary widely in their statutory and political capacity to raise MLO revenue. **This limits future CSI MLO growth.**

CSI Geographic Footprint





# Budget Solutions




Proactively proposed removal of MDOL students from the CSI MLE calculation ~ \$1M annual savings



Opportunities for greater transparency



Opportunities for greater partnership



# Thank you for continuing to make a positive impact in the lives of CSI students and CSI schools.

MLOE has given us the resources to offer **competitive salaries** and make **essential facilities upgrades**, ensuring we can better support our staff and students.

*Leader, The Academy of Charter Schools*

“New Legacy gave me the confidence and reassurance of why I needed to believe in myself and most importantly to remind myself who is looking at me as a role model, and that was my daughter.”

Student, New Legacy Charter School