



**Colorado Department of Education  
Prevention Initiatives  
Dropout Prevention and Student Engagement  
October 2009**

**Overview**

New efforts to support dropout prevention and student engagement at the Colorado Department of Education are being initiated with State Fiscal Stabilization Funds through the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act of 2009, which was awarded for fiscal years 2009-2010 and 2010-2011 from the office of Gov. Bill Ritter. This effort is authorized by Colorado Revised Statute 22-14-101 and builds on the state's commitment to ensure graduation and school success for all students and re-engaging out of school youth. There are five main components to this work:

- 1) Analyzing student data pertaining to dropout, completion rates, truancy, suspension and expulsion rates, safety and discipline incidences and student growth.
- 2) Coordinating efforts across the CDE and leading initiatives to address dropout prevention and student re-engagement.
- 3) Identifying priority school districts and working with these districts to create and evaluate graduation and completion plans.
- 4) Identifying and recommending best practices and effective strategies to reduce student dropout rates and increase student engagement and re-engagement.
- 5) Securing resources to develop a grant program to fund services and supports.

**Leveraging Resources**

This effort is positioned within the Prevention Initiatives Unit to enable prompt application of State Fiscal Stabilization Funds and promotes integration of state services. The Prevention Initiative Unit has over a decade of experience in prevention work and provides the infrastructure to improve efforts in dropout prevention and re-engagement of those children and youth who are not in school.

The core issues that influence whether or not a student graduates from high school are addressed through multiple efforts at the CDE. Resources and technical assistance from CDE concentrate on the following effective practices for dropout prevention:

- Student performance and credit recovery, especially in core classes
- Staff member expectations and demonstration of support
- Teacher preparedness and instruction
- Parent engagement with their children and schools
- Social, emotional, health and behavioral supports
- Rigorous, yet flexible, alternative instruction
- Re-enrollment and transition strategies

The new work on dropout prevention and student engagement will expand efforts at state and district levels and will leverage existing resources to implement plans and recommendations. Following are examples of both state and federal funding to promote practices that address the needs of students who drop out of the public K-12 system before graduation. Additional resources



are being sought to support specific dropout prevention efforts in school districts identified as high priority.

### **Expelled and At-Risk Student Services Grant Program**

This program is authorized by Colorado Revised State Statute 22-33-205. The grant provides state funding and technical assistance to school districts, charter, alternative and private, non-parochial schools, eligible facilities and Boards of Cooperative Educational Services to provide education for students who have been expelled. The grant program also provides technical assistance to prevent suspensions and expulsions. Grantees implement strategies to address re-engaging non-traditional and disenfranchised students who are involved in:

- Truancy and low attendance
- Student behavior issues tied to discipline referral, suspensions and expulsions
- Lack of school engagement and connectedness

A requirement for family engagement leads to higher student achievement, better attendance and more homework completion. Many of these strategies are also best practices for dropout prevention and closing the achievement gap. *Funding allocation for 2009-2010: \$7.3 million in state funding (Amendment 23), which includes funding awards to 59 sites.*

### **Colorado Connections for Healthy Schools**

“Colorado Connections” is a statewide partnership between CDE and the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment. This effort is federally funded through the Centers for Disease Control. It is designed to create a state infrastructure and to fund local school districts for coordinated school health, including comprehensive health education. The health education conforms with the Colorado Comprehensive Health Education Act of 1990. Strategies address health issues which interfere with student academic success, attendance and school connectedness. Students with poor nutrition and low levels of physical activity are more likely to be absent and tardy. Students with unmet medical needs are less likely to achieve and attend school. Students engaging in high-risk behaviors are more likely to drop out of school due to teen pregnancy, teen parenting and/or health and mental health related issues. *Funding allocation from the state (Amendment 23) for comprehensive health education: \$300,000 annually.*

### **Safe and Drug Free Schools and Communities, Title IV-A of No Child Left Behind**

This effort addresses school connectedness and safe, civil learning environments. This federally funded program is designed to prevent violence and to prevent alcohol, tobacco and other drug use. It seeks to create positive school environments and to provide mental health services and increase social and emotional skills, such as coping and problem solving. *Funding allocation for 2008-2009: \$2,568,374 in federal funding, which is distributed to approximately 144 school districts and BOCES.*

### **Title X, Part C of No Child Left Behind (McKinney-Vento Education of Homeless Children and Youth)**

This is federally funded program that provides resources and training so that homeless children are enrolled in school and have accessible transportation and support services. The program was originally authorized in 1987 and, most recently, reauthorized as Title X, Part C of the Federal No Child Left Behind Act of 2001. In Colorado there are 12,302 identified homeless students who are at higher risk for dropping out. Students who remain at the same high school are more than twice



as likely to graduate as students who change schools one or more times. *Funding allocation for 2009-2010: \$854,579 in federal funding to 17 sub-grantees, impacting 32 school districts and BOCES. In addition, \$924,815 from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act was awarded to 42 districts and to BOCES.*

### **Dropout Prevention Activity Grant**

Pursuant to Colorado Revised Statute 22-27.5-103, this program is funded through a voluntary contributions check-off item on the Colorado Individual Income Tax Return. The program provides additional funding for schools to sponsor before-school, after-school and summer programs that encourage positive school attachment and provides greater incentives for some students to stay in school. *Funding allocation based on state income tax check off. In 2008-2009, funds were awarded to four sites.*

### **Learn and Serve Colorado**

Learn and Serve Colorado provides federal funding and technical assistance for re-engaging students through service-learning. Service learning promotes positive youth development, citizenship, and academic achievement through active participation in meaningful service to their schools and communities. Opportunities for service learning increase connectedness to school and community and ensure that students have a safe and civil learning environment. Students report more engagement in and attachment to school when they participate in service-learning. *Funding allocation for 2008-2009: \$219,690 in federal funding distributed to six grantees (Denver, Lake, Boulder, Colorado Springs and Campo school districts and the Northwest Consortium (Wray, Haxtun and Holyoke.) Awards for the 2009-2010 school year have not yet been finalized.*

### **Pilot Program to Close the Achievement Gap**

This pilot program provides three-year grants to six school districts to provide the opportunity to conduct comprehensive appraisals of district improvement needs, identify resources to meet these needs and develop comprehensive plans to improve student achievement. Pilot districts are required to meet certain program objectives in order to receive continuation funding. *Funding allocation for 2008-2009: \$1.8 million, which funds pilot grants to Eagle County School District 50J, Greeley-Evans School District 6, Roaring Fork School District, St. Vrain Valley School District, Summit School District and Yuma School District-1.*

### **School Counselor Grant Program**

This program provides state funding to increase the number of school counselors. Grants will support increasing the percentage of students who appropriately prepare for, apply to and continue into postsecondary education. *Funding allocation for 2008-2009: \$5,000,000, which funds 37 districts, serving 92 schools and 76 new counseling positions.*

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For a copy of the authorizing legislation related to House Bill 1243, visit <http://www.leg.state.co.us/>.