



COLORADO
Department of Education

2021-22 State Policy Report: Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement

Submitted to:
Office of the Governor
Colorado State Board of Education
Colorado House Education Committee
Colorado Senate Education Committee

This report was prepared pursuant to C.R.S. 22-14-111 and covers the 2021-2022 school year. It was prepared by the following staff from the Colorado Department of Education's Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement:

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Executive Summary

One of Colorado Department of Education's (CDE) five strategic plan goals is that "Students graduate high school with knowledge, skills and experience needed for college and career success." Students who are able to attain this goal have the potential for better life outcomes and have choices as they graduate high school. This report provides an overview of key metrics that provide an indication of progress towards this goal and information about initiatives across the state intended to improve these outcomes.

Outcome overview

Outcome data from the 2021-2022 school year show that Colorado high school graduation and completion rates increased to their highest rate in Colorado history during the 2021-2022 school year. After a decline in graduation rate in 2020-2021, the four-year graduation rate for the Class of 2022 was 82.3 percent, a 0.6 percentage point increase from the previous year and a 9.9 percentage point increase from 2010. This increase occurred during the first year of full implementation of the [Graduation Guidelines](#) and the reporting to CDE of which of the options each student met.

As has been the case in previous years, outcome data for prior classes shows that additional students meet graduation expectations in five, six, and seven years. For instance, the class of 2019 had a four-year graduation rate of 81.1 percent. By the end of the 2021-2022 school year, the seven-year rate for the class of 2019 had risen to 87.2 percent.

However, in contrast to previous years, the improvements in graduation rate were not mirrored in other outcomes included in this report. There were additional signs of disengagement from learning and school in the 2021-2022 school year including higher dropout rates, lower attendance, and higher numbers of behavior incidents. While understanding what this means about student engagement is complicated, given that we had public health quarantines in place throughout the past 2.5 years where students were encouraged to stay at home when they are sick, it points to more disrupted learning than in previous years.

- The dropout rate, 2.2 percent in the 2021-2022 school year, also increased by 0.4 percentage points making it equal to the dropout rate in 2017-2018. This is the largest increase in the Colorado dropout rate since it began falling in the 2009-2010 school year.
- There was a 1.7 percentage point decrease in the attendance rate from 2020-2021 school year, with students attending 90.2 percent of possible days.
- Chronic absenteeism rose in 2021-22, with nearly 100,000 more cases than the year prior and more than 1 in every 3 Colorado students missing more than 10 percent of the school year.
- Behavior incidents rose in 2021-2022 after a massive drop in 2020-2021 that was at least partially due to the suspension of in-person learning for many students. However, incidents rose to the highest level in the past five years and the differences between racial and ethnic groups increased with Black and American Indian students involved in behavior incidents at much higher rates than Asian and White students.

Historically, students living in poverty, students of color, and students with disabilities have graduated at lower rates and dropped out or disengaged at higher rates. Colorado statistics show that minority male students, students of color, youth experiencing homelessness, and those in foster care experience disproportionate rates of graduation, dropout, and school disciplinary actions. While there was some reduction of gaps between



student groups and overall state averages in graduation and completion rates, persistent and large gaps remain. This trend in graduation, completion, and dropout rates for identified student groups is similar to trends seen across the nation.⁴

Support efforts

During the 2021-2022 school year, districts worked tirelessly to present students with highly engaging learning opportunities and to provide targeted support for students who showed early or ongoing signs of disengagement. During the 2021-2022 year, many districts and CDE used Elementary and Secondary School Emergency Relief (ESSER) funds to support these efforts, including for high dosage tutoring, additional counseling support, expanding engaging learning opportunities, among other strategies.

CDE's efforts directly focused on improving engagement outcomes are organized around the [Colorado Dropout Prevention Framework](#), an evidence-based framework. The framework outlines strategies for a strong foundation for rigorous and relevant coursework and development of systems to support students who need more attention to reach their full potential. During the 2021-2022 school year, CDE managed \$12,957,283 in grant funding to districts, BOCES, and facility schools who served over 14,000 students within grant programs directly focused on dropout prevention and intervention efforts.

While it is not possible to predict precisely how post-pandemic student outcome data will evolve in the years to come, this year may provide some indication. While the 2021-2022 graduation rate rose again after its first decline in over 10 years in 2020-2021, this improvement was not seen in other measures. Both the dropout rate and rate of chronic absenteeism rose, and there was a rise in behavior incidents, although unexcused absences did not rise. These trends might continue in future graduation and completion rates if students do not re-engage fully and accelerate progress before anticipated graduation years. Even with some of these declines, there are examples of districts and schools maintaining or improving outcomes in 2021-2022, and many schools and districts that were able to organize and support efforts to keep kids engaged at high levels and provide additional targeted acceleration opportunities.

Reporting Requirements

State law requires the Office of Dropout Prevention and Student Re-engagement to complete an annual report on reducing the student dropout rate, increasing the high school graduation and completion rates, and improving student engagement. This report was prepared in accordance with state statute, section 22-14-111, C.R.S, for the 2021-2022 school year. Data included in this report were pulled from the 2021-2022 Student End-of-Year Snapshot, Student October Snapshot, and the School Discipline and Attendance collection.