

# Start Strong, Stay Engaged, Leave Ready!

CDE's 2025-2028 Strategic Plan



**COLORADO**  
Department of Education

Dear Coloradans,

We are pleased to share the Colorado Department of Education's new strategic plan with you. **Start Strong, Stay Engaged, Leave Ready** sets a vision to create equitable educational environments where all students and staff in Colorado thrive.

Colorado has a proud history of local control for public education which supports local communities and their unique needs. At the Colorado Department of Education, we work to serve, guide, and elevate our state's school districts and BOCES to ensure great outcomes for students, educators and families across our state.

Our priorities reflect the most pressing and common needs across Colorado schools: increasing student engagement, accelerating student outcomes, strengthening the educator workforce, and providing operational excellence. We have also identified "Big Bet Strategies" that will help us address these priorities.

Our "Big Bet Strategies" include:

- Serving educators and school districts through *professional development, convenings for peer learning*, and *using data to understand what works*;
- Guiding educators and school districts by supporting the implementation of *high-impact practices* and *effectively communicating state policy*; and
- Elevating educators and school districts through data-driven "*bright spots*" and *highlighting the educator profession*.

We know that it takes all of us - teachers, support staff, school and district leaders, policy makers and elected officials - working together to support our students to achieve their fullest potential.

Strong schools are the heart of thriving communities, and each of us has a role to play in improving student outcomes in our state. We invite you to get involved by contacting your local school district to learn about volunteer opportunities in your area.

Regards,



Rebecca McClellan  
Chair, Colorado State Board of Education



Susana Córdova  
Education Commissioner



# OUR VISION

To create an equitable educational environment where all students and staff in Colorado thrive.

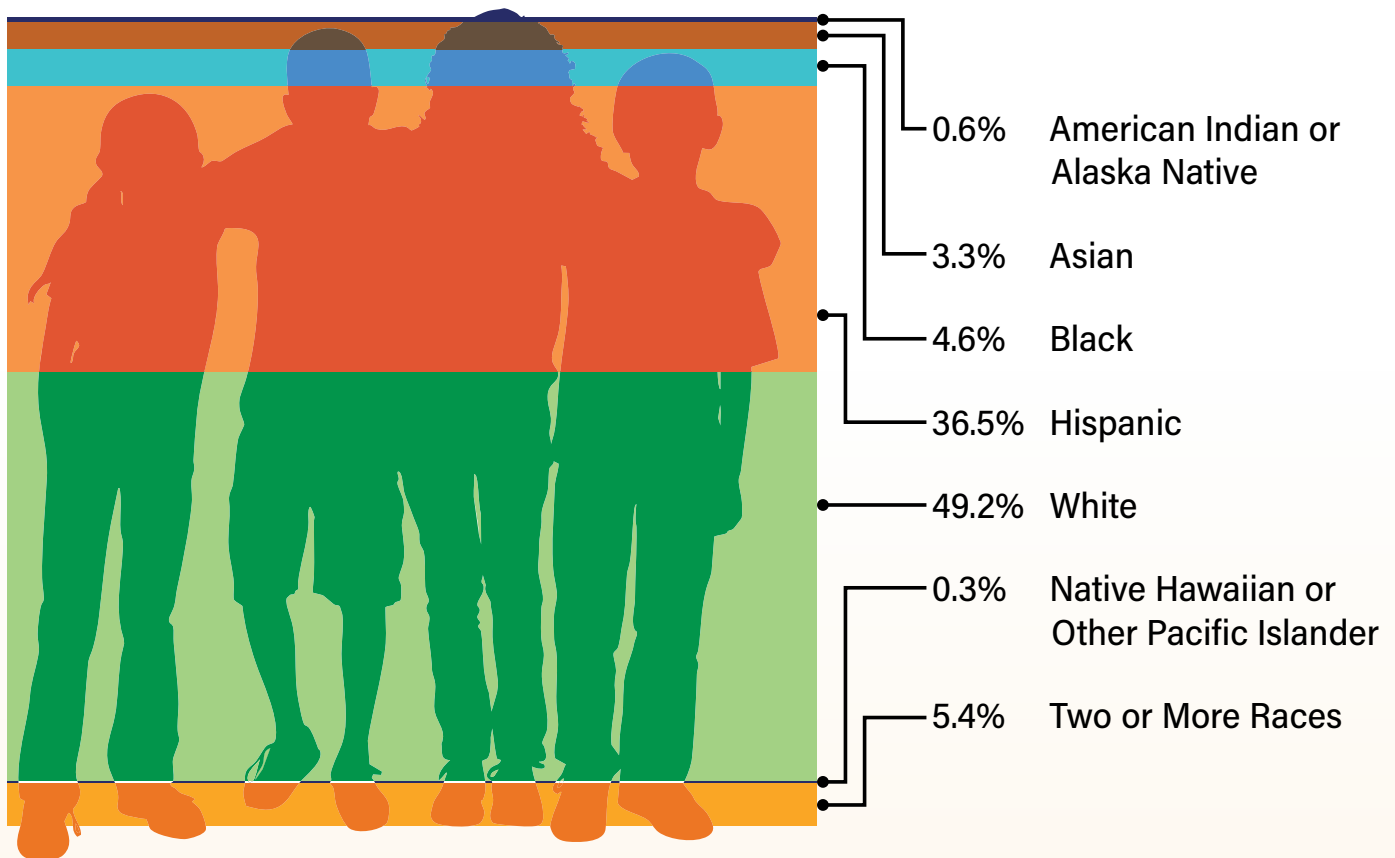
**178**  
SCHOOL DISTRICTS

**1,927**  
SCHOOLS

**55,358**  
EDUCATORS

**881,065**  
PUBLIC SCHOOL STUDENTS

## Colorado Students\*



Eligible for Free/  
Reduced Lunch

**44.8%**  
**394,765**

Students with  
Individualized  
Education Programs

**13.3%**  
**117,616**

Multilingual  
Learners

**12.0%**  
**105,362**

Students  
Experiencing  
Homelessness

**1.6%**  
**14,498**

\*October 2023 Data

## OUR ROLE

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 experience of local educational agencies and students



## OUR VALUES

We ground our work with our team and the field in our core values:

Integrity • Equity • Accountability • Trust • Service



# OUR PRIORITIES

## Increasing Student Engagement

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## Strengthening the Educator Workforce

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## Providing Operational Excellence

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# Increasing Student Engagement



Colorado students learn best when they stay engaged in safe and supportive learning environments.



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.

## When we work to...

- Develop tools and share effective practices that support a climate and culture of belonging and engagement
- Support persistence and re-engagement of students
- Expand use of instructional practices that encourage student engagement in learning
- Address student mental health and wellbeing with programs partners

## We will see...

- Increases in climate and culture measures for students
- Increases in student attendance
- Increases in graduation and re-engagement and reduction in dropout rates

## STRATEGIES

- Strengthen capacity to boost attendance across all grade levels
- Expand resources to strengthen student and staff wellbeing and belonging
- Expand resources and support for students' physical, mental, and behavioral health
- Strengthen educator skills for providing engaging, innovative instruction
- Enhance family and community partnerships to boost student engagement

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## ACTIVITIES

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| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Launch a statewide campaign to boost attendance with community support.</li><li>▪ Promote the Landscape of Wellbeing and Belonging Framework.</li><li>▪ Highlight, share, and scale effective instructional practices.</li><li>▪ Create culturally responsive resources and training for school-family partnerships.</li><li>▪ Collaborate with school districts, BOCES, and partners to develop a vision for innovative instructional practice.</li><li>▪ Use student attendance and academic data, along with feedback from students and families, to improve targeted attendance supports.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Expand the Dropout Prevention Framework to strengthen district and school capacity with new attendance tools, resources, and training.</li><li>▪ Build local capacity to improve school culture, climate, well-being, and belonging for students, staff, and families.</li><li>▪ Enhance access to physical, mental, and behavioral health resources for students and educators through better inter-agency collaboration.</li><li>▪ Use data and student/family feedback to guide future health and academic programs and interventions, such as school meals and wellness teams.</li><li>▪ Share best practices and resources for physical, mental, and behavioral health.</li></ul> |
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## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

### Our success metrics include:

- Increases in the percentage of high school youth responding on the Healthy Kids Colorado Survey that "they enjoyed being in school (most of the time or always) over the last year"
- Improved chronic absenteeism rates for students in school districts participating in attendance-focused learning cohorts
- Increases in the percentage of staff responding positively to the Teaching and Learning Conditions Colorado survey about feelings of belonging in their school communities

# Accelerating Student Outcomes

Colorado students start strong with effective literacy instruction and support. Colorado high school graduates leave ready with work-based learning experiences and post-secondary credentials.



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



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 (from Learning Through Work and Learning at Work sections of the Work-based Learning Continuum)

## When we work to...

- Enhance the effectiveness of teaching and learning by focusing on evidence-based methods and improving best-first instruction
- Expand opportunities to obtain college credits, industry credentials, and work-based learning experiences
- Increase access for historically underrepresented or underserved students to grade level learning opportunities
- Elevate bright spots and best practices across the state that showcase "beating the odds" academic performance

## We will see...

- Accelerated student growth with a focus on historically underserved students
- Increased English language arts and math achievement, with a specific focus on 3rd grade reading
- Improved outcomes for English learners
- Increased four- and seven-year graduation rates



## STRATEGIES

### Elementary

- Build educator capacity to deliver effective early literacy practices, especially for underserved students
- Strengthen and coordinate tiered literacy support for districts based on their specific needs
- Use statewide data to spotlight districts and schools with exceptional early literacy outcomes for disadvantaged students

### Secondary

- Support district-level efforts to provide multiple pathway options for postsecondary workforce readiness (PWR) aligned to student interests and goals

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## ACTIVITIES

### Elementary

- Provide targeted district-level support to build instructional coherence through high-quality curriculum, assessments, interventions, and training.
- Expand math and literacy training to improve core instruction and consistency.
- Redesign CDE awards to recognize and celebrate schools with strong results.
- Incorporate successful practices and models tailored to district types into educator professional learning.
- Provide resources to help districts analyze rigorous, culturally responsive curriculum, assessments, and interventions.
- Expand tools for districts to evaluate teaching and learning practices.

### Secondary

- Create models for rural districts to expand access and enable cross-district collaboration on best practices
- Offer guidance on apprenticeships, micro-credentials, internships, certificates, and diploma endorsements
- Review policies to find and address barriers, opening up new pathways for relevant secondary education

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## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

### Our success metrics include:

- Increases in the percentage of districts using high quality instructional materials
- Increases in Colorado four- and seven- year graduation rates
- Decreases in the number of schools identified as Priority Improvement or Turnaround

# Strengthening the Educator Workforce



Colorado students thrive when educators stay engaged because they feel prepared, supported, and valued.



By 2027-28, 98% of teacher positions are filled with educators who either (1) hold 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.

## When we work to...

- Create the most enabling conditions for educator retention
- Support leadership development opportunities for current and aspiring school leaders
- Expand access to high quality pathways to the educator profession
- Collaborate with education partners to develop and launch a public information campaign about the benefits of the educator profession

## We will see...

- Increases in number of positions filled by fully qualified educators, particularly in Special Education and other priority areas
- Increases in Colorado educator retention
- Increases in diversity of educator workforce
- Increases in participation in and completion of routes to educator preparation

## STRATEGIES

- Strengthen state-level support for educator recruitment and retention
- Increase aspiring educator participation in preparation and licensure pathways
- Improve educator working conditions through leadership development programs
- Promote the profession to attract and retain educators

## ACTIVITIES

- |  |   |
|--|---|
| <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Align department support for districts and BOCES with a tracking system.</li><li>▪ Invest in long-term workforce diversity by supporting “grow your own” educator programs.</li><li>▪ Launch a communications plan to raise awareness of licensure pathways.</li><li>▪ Provide bilingual resources on educator programs and licensure pathways.</li><li>▪ Develop special education induction and mentoring to support educators and service providers in hard-to-fill areas.</li><li>▪ Improve data-based decision-making by expanding retention data collection to include special service providers.</li><li>▪ Assist districts and educator programs that rely heavily on emergency, interim, or substitute educators.</li></ul> | <ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>▪ Strengthen CDE leadership programs with a cross-department team to align resources and strategies.</li><li>▪ Help school leaders create belonging by sharing culturally responsive supervision practices.</li><li>▪ Strengthen leadership development within districts by providing guidance and sample induction curriculum for administrators.</li><li>▪ Expand the educator pipeline by encouraging middle and high school students to consider teaching.</li><li>▪ Elevate the educator profession through strategic communications and media engagement.</li></ul> |
|--|---|

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

### Our success metrics include:

- Improved participation in district-level “grow your own” educator programs
- Decreases in classroom educator turnover rates
- Increases in the percentage of educators reporting that their schools are “led by an effective team”

# Providing Operational Excellence

Colorado's Department of Education provides exceptional service through improved efficiencies and a growth-oriented culture.



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).

## When we work to...

- Develop staff culture and operations that support and facilitate CDE's values
- Provide learning and growth opportunities for staff
- Improve and innovate operational systems and procedures that meet—and drive—industry standards
- Strengthen financial processes and supports for schools and districts

## We will see...

- Develop a culture of employee growth and opportunities
- Analyze Internal Systems for efficiencies and automation opportunities
- Explore opportunities for external operational efficiencies and automation opportunities to improve the experience of schools, districts, grantees and other customers



## STRATEGIES

- Develop a culture of employee growth and opportunities
- Analyze internal systems for efficiencies and automation opportunities
- Identify ways to improve efficiency and automation to enhance support for schools, districts, and grantees

## ACTIVITIES

### External

- Implement state grant project recommendations to streamline processes and enhance grantee experience.
- Redesign and relaunch the CDE website for improved user experiences and access to relevant information.
- Explore the feasibility of a state-wide student information system as a means for operational efficiency.

### Internal

- Identify key factors impacting CDE team experiences and develop plans to address them.
- Strengthen leadership to promote transparent decision-making, accountability, and alignment with CDE values.
- Foster a culture of trust by gathering employee feedback and sharing progress updates.
- Support a smooth HRIS rollout by clearly communicating key human resources process changes.
- Engage staff to build on past LEAN work, identifying further process improvements and efficiencies.
- Actively involve staff in modernizing internal systems through input, clear communication, and training, while addressing any policy or process gaps.

## MEASURES OF SUCCESS

### Our success metrics include:

- Improvements in employee response rates and participation in feedback and professional learning opportunities
- Improved user experiences on the department's website and during the grant application and monitoring process
- Decreases in the amount of time it takes to fill vacancies at CDE

We are deeply grateful to the many individuals who committed their time, energy, and talents to creating Start Strong, Stay Engaged, Leave Ready.

**Increasing  
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**Team members from across the department supported  
our steering committees in their work.**

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### **Partners**

Colorado Association of School Executives  
Colorado Education Association  
Northern Colorado Superintendents Council  
Northeast Superintendent Advisory Committee  
Pikes Peak Superintendents Association  
Rural Superintendents Alliance  
San Juan BOCES  
Southern Colorado Superintendents Councils  
Western Slope Superintendents Organization  
Uncompahgre BOCES Superintendents Advisory Council

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Melissa Thorne  
Joyce Zurkowski



Take the attendance challenge to reduce chronic absenteeism by 50% in the 2027-2028 school year.



Learn more about how you can support student attendance at [cdeinfo.org/attendance](https://cdeinfo.org/attendance).

## Follow our journey!

[cde.state.co.state.us](https://cde.state.co.state.us)



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