

# Expelled and At-Risk Student Services Grant Program Annual Evaluation Report

Submitted to:

**Colorado State Board of Education**  
**Colorado House Education Committee**  
**Colorado Senate Education Committee**

This report was prepared in accordance with section 22-33-205, C.R.S., by the following staff from the Colorado Department of Education's Office of Student Engagement and Dropout Prevention:

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## **Executive Summary**

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The Expelled and At-Risk Student Services (EARSS) program is authorized by section 22-33-205, C.R.S. This grant program provides educational and support services to expelled students, students at risk of being expelled, and truant students. This includes students who are at risk of being declared habitually disruptive and/or habitually truant. Funds are annually appropriated to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) for the purpose of making grants available to eligible applicants. The program is managed by the Office of Student Engagement and Dropout Prevention.

Exclusionary disciplinary practices (like suspension and expulsion) put students at an increased risk of low academic achievement, increased risk of dropping out, and increased risk of future police involvement<sup>1</sup>. The EARSS program's approach maintains that more students will stay in school, maintain regular attendance, and make progress toward graduation if schools provide support services to expelled and at-risk students, offer alternatives to suspension and expulsion, and create effective educational, attendance and disciplinary practices. In 2020-2021, the General Assembly appropriated \$9,493,560 for the program and CDE awarded funds to 57 grantees.

### **More than 6,500 Students and 4,000 Parents, Families, and Guardians Served**

Fifty-seven grantees served 2,197 students at risk of being expelled, 4,305 truant students or students at risk for habitual truancy, and 71 expelled students.

Of the more than 2,000 at-risk and expelled students served, the most common reasons for being served were disobedient/defiant behavior (37.7 percent of students) or detrimental behavior (26.6 percent of students).

Available student level data indicated that 57.1 percent of students served were male and most were Hispanic (53.7 percent of students) or White (36.6 percent of students). The majority of students were in ninth to twelfth grade (47.0 percent of students), followed by sixth through eighth grade (34.2 percent of students), and then kindergarten through fifth grade (18.8 percent of students).

More than 4,000 parents and guardians received support services to assist in their children's learning, positive engagement and academic development. The grantees indicated that the most common support services available to families included involving parents/guardians in academic, attendance, and/or behavioral planning, communication, referrals to community services/social services, and family engagement and relationship-building meetings.

### **The EARSS Program Met Legislative Intent**

Evaluation results indicate that the legislative intent of the EARSS program to prevent expulsions, suspensions, and truancy was met. Grantees reported that while being served by the EARSS program, 99.2 percent of at-risk students were not expelled, 89 percent of at-risk students did not receive an out-of-school suspension, 90 percent of at-risk students did not receive an in-school suspension, and 95 percent of truant students did not have a truancy petition filed in court.

### **Majority of Students Experienced Positive Outcomes**

Overall, 97.2 percent remained in school or graduated and completed school. This is consistent with results from the last three years of the grant program (with an average of 96.6 percent of students served graduating or completing school).



## Impact of COVID-19 on Programs

The most common challenges that impacted implementation, as reported by grantees, in 2020-2021 were directly related to the COVID-19 pandemic. Grantees cited having difficulty implementing services traditionally done in-person, were able to identify fewer students for support, or discontinued aspects of the programs due to limitations of in-person learning environments. Grantees reported a decrease in student engagement/increase in disengagement during the transition from in-person programming to blended or remote programming. Twenty-five percent of grantees reported being unable to measure at least one performance measure due to the impact of COVID on their EARSS program due to the significant impact the pandemic had on the traditional learning environment. Grantees reported a significant academic stall and/or regression with students when reviewing performance measures. Attendance rates were impacted by the multiple learning environments and grantees experienced difficulty in monitoring students' attendance and academic work in a consistent manner.

Successes were also reported as many grantees were able to adapt programming to focus more on credit completion and relationship building. Grantees maintained and adapted services to the greatest extent possible during this difficult disruption to direct, in-person student services (e.g., check-in calls and virtual visits, using multiple means to track down and engage truant students, continued one-on-one support to address individual needs, socially distant home visits). Grantees cited their ability to assist students and their families in dealing with loss of friends and family, focusing on grief and the impact it has on students' academic lives when asked about services provided during the year. Grantees also shared pride in the progress students made during such turbulent times.



## **Introduction: Expulsion Prevention and Intervention**

Colorado's school attendance laws include several provisions that address the education of students who break school conduct and discipline codes or are deemed at risk of suspension or expulsion. Included in these laws is a legislative framework for expulsion prevention and intervention. See Colo. Rev. Stat., Title 22, Article 33, Part 2: Expulsion Prevention Programs.

The law states that there are disciplinary violations that justify expulsion; however, it also addresses alternatives to expulsion when discretion is allowed. In such cases, the legislation directs school districts to develop a plan to provide the necessary support services to help students avoid expulsion. The Colorado General Assembly also created the Expelled and At-Risk Student Services (EARSS) grant program to assist grantee school districts in providing such services.

### **The EARSS Program**

The EARSS program provides educational and support services to expelled students, students at risk of being expelled, students at risk of dropping out of school due to chronic absenteeism or disciplinary action, and truant students. This includes students who are at risk of being declared habitually disruptive and/or habitually truant. Funds are annually appropriated to the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) for the purpose of making grants in accordance with authorizing legislation.

The program's approach maintains that more students will stay in school, regularly attend, and make progress toward graduation if school staff provide support services to expelled and at-risk students, offer alternatives to suspension and expulsion, and create effective attendance and discipline systems in schools.

### **Grant Application and Selection Process**

The EARSS program is managed through CDE's Office of Student Engagement and Dropout Prevention. Competitive grant reviews occur each year based on the level of funding appropriated by the legislature. Eligible grant applicants include school districts, Boards of Cooperative Educational Services (BOCES), charter schools, alternative education schools within school districts, non-public schools, and facility schools. Grants are awarded for four sequential fiscal years provided that grantees are meeting grant requirements and making reasonable progress toward performance outcomes, and that state funds are annually appropriated.

## **COLO. REV. STAT. TITLE 22, ART. 33 PART 2: EXPULSION PREVENTION PROGRAMS**

### *22-33-201. Legislative declaration.*

The general assembly hereby finds that except when a student's behavior would cause imminent harm to others in the school or when an incident requires expulsion as defined by state law or a school's conduct and discipline code, expulsion should be the last step taken after several attempts to support a student who has discipline problems.

The general assembly further finds that school districts should work with the student's parent or guardian and with state agencies and community-based non-public organizations to develop alternatives to help students who are at risk of expulsion before expulsion becomes a necessary step and to support students who are unable to avoid expulsion.

22-33-202(2). In providing necessary support services pursuant to subsection (1) of this section, each school district may provide attendance supports, behavior intervention, and educational services to students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade who are identified as at risk of dropping out of school due to chronic absenteeism or disciplinary actions, including classroom removal, suspension and expulsion. Any school district that provides attendance supports, behavior intervention, or educational services to students in pre-kindergarten through twelfth grade who are at risk of dropping out of school due to chronic absenteeism or disciplinary actions may apply for money through the expelled and at-risk student services grant program established in section 22-33-205 to assist in providing such attendance, behavior intervention, and educational services.



## Reporting Requirements

The EARSS authorizing legislation (section 22-33-205, C.R.S.) requires reporting on the evaluation of the grant to the Colorado House and Senate Education Committees. This report is intended to meet the statutory reporting requirements outlined in section 22-33-205(4), C.R.S., through the analysis of program-level and student-level information annually submitted to CDE by grantees. This report covers evaluation data from 57 grantees available between July 1, 2020 to June 30, 2021. For more details on the evaluation methodology, see **Appendix A – Evaluation Methodology**. For the survey tools from the evaluation, visit the EARSS Evaluation website at [www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/earss\\_evaluation](http://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/earss_evaluation).

## 2020-2021 Grant Awards

For the 2020-2021 school year, the General Assembly appropriated \$9,493,560 for the program. CDE awarded 10 new grants and 47 continuation awards for grantees moving into years two through four.

**TABLE 1** shows the number and percent of grantees per cohort. See **Appendix B** for a list of grantees.

Sixteen grantees (28 percent of grantees) served students from more than one school district. This occurs when the grantee is a Board of Cooperative Services, a facility school, or the grantee is in a rural area and offering services to neighboring districts. Over 24 percent of active facility schools currently have an EARSS grant.

**TABLE 1: Grantees by Cohort and Type (N=57)**

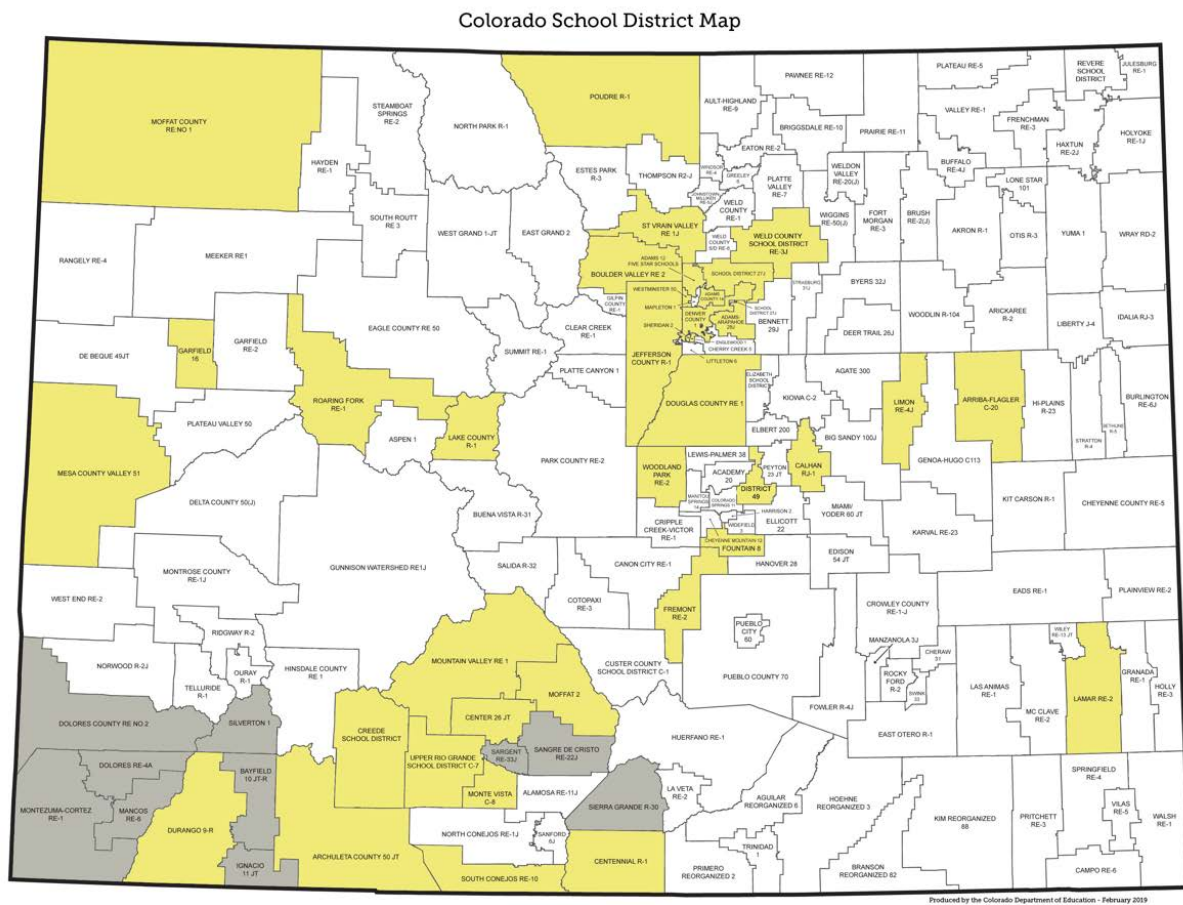
Cohort Year	Number of Grantees	Percent of Grantees
Funded 2020-2025	10	17.5
Funded 2019-2024	7	12.3
Funded 2018-2023	27	47.4
Funded 2017-2022	13	22.8

Source: Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021.

## District Map

The 57 grantees funded in 2020-2021 represent 27 counties across Colorado. EARSS funded 37 school districts, nine individual charter schools, three BOCES, and eight facility schools. *See the School District Map on the next page which highlights all the districts served by the grant. School districts served by BOCES are highlighted in grey.*

**Note:** Some school districts and charter schools were funded with more than one EARSS grant in 2020-2021.



## State Comparison

The EARSS program provides educational and support services to expelled and at-risk students. This includes students at-risk of being expelled, truant students, and students who are at risk of being declared habitually truant. It is estimated that 31 percent of Colorado’s expelled students and 14 percent of suspended students are served by the EARSS program.<sup>1</sup>

Truancy represents unexcused absences that could lead to being declared habitually truant, which increases the likelihood of petitions being filed in truancy court to enforce compulsory school attendance. It is estimated that two percent of habitually truant students are served by the EARSS program.<sup>1</sup>



### Students Served in 2020-2021

In 2020-2021, EARSS program grantees reported serving 6,573 students.

- Twenty-one grantees reported serving **71 expelled students** (1.1 percent of students served).
- Fifty-two grantees reported serving **2,197 students at risk for expulsion** (33.4 percent of students served).
- Fifty-one grantees reported serving **4,305 truant students or students at risk for habitual truancy** (65.5 percent of students served).

### Facility School Grantees Students Served

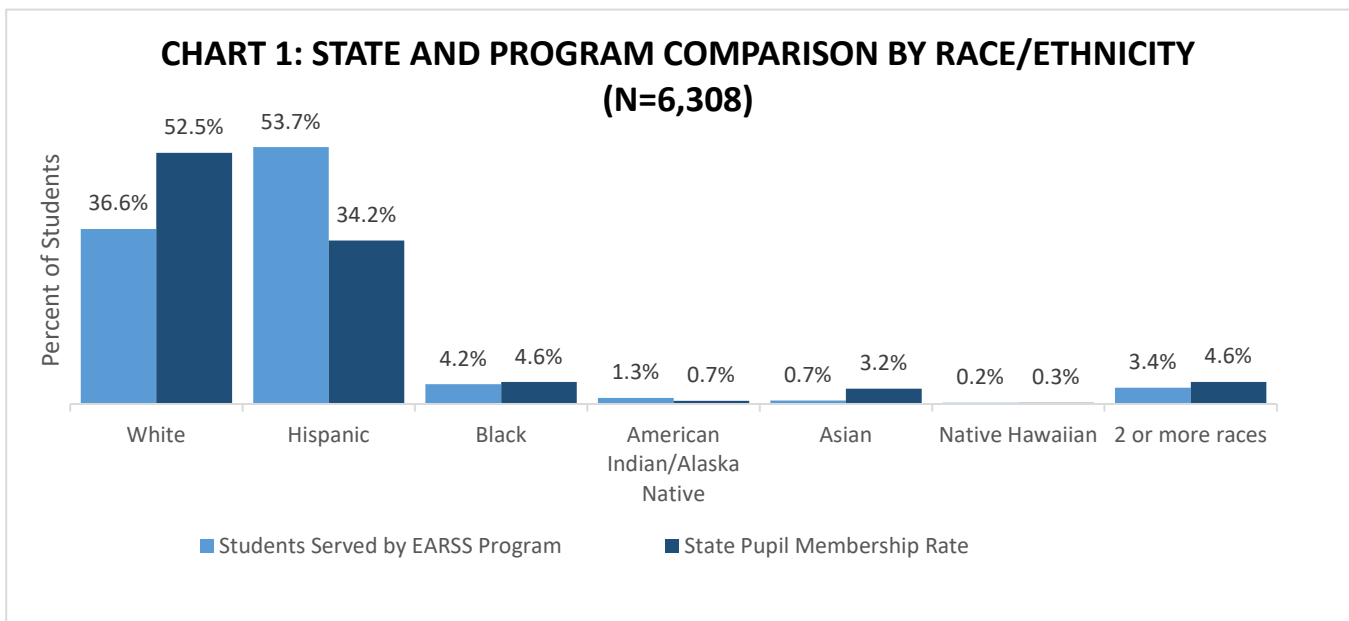
Facility schools served 6.1 percent of all students served by the grant. The 402 students served by facility schools included:

- 4.0 percent expelled students
- 93.0 percent students at-risk of expulsion
- 3.0 percent truant students or students at risk for habitual truancy

### Student Demographics

Demographic data was available for 96.0 percent of the students served by an EARSS program (6,308 students). A review by grade level showed that most students were in ninth to twelfth grade (47.0 percent of students), followed by sixth through eighth grade (34.2 percent of students), and then kindergarten to fifth grade (18.8 percent of students).

The available data show most students served were male (57.1 percent of students) and Hispanic or Latino (53.7 percent of students) and White (36.6 percent of students). **CHART 1** shows a breakout by race/ethnicity for the students served by the program compared to the 2020-2021 pupil membership rate.



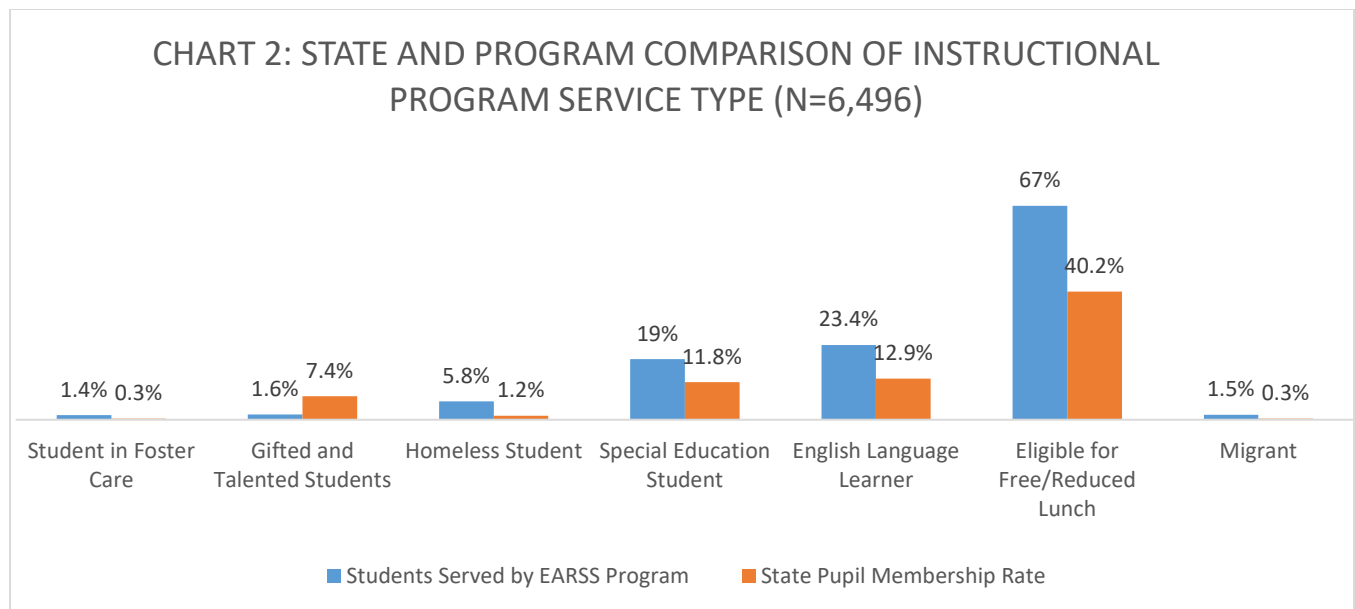
Source: Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting and Pupil Membership Data, 2020-2021





Student-level data for students served in the 2020-2021 academic school year showed that 67.0 percent of students served qualified for free/reduced lunch, 23.4 percent of students were English learners, 19.0 percent of students had a special education designation, and 5.8 percent of students were homeless. *Note that the process for eligibility for Free/Reduced Lunch changed for many districts in 2020-2021 given that all students were eligible for free meals so many districts changed this collection process. This may impact the identification of students who were eligible based on income definitions.*

**CHART 2** shows a breakout by instructional program service types for the students served by the program compared to the state average pupil membership rate of all students in 2020-2021.



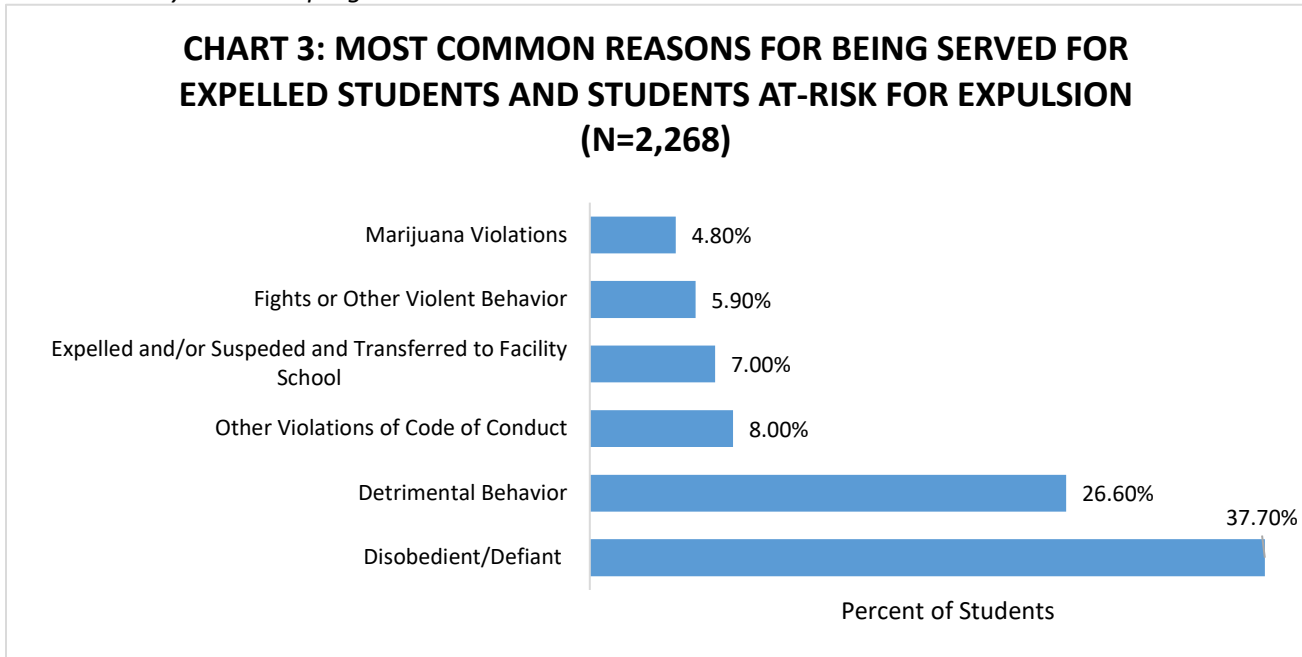
**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Report and Pupil Membership Data, 2020-2021.

**Note:** These student groups are not mutually exclusive.



## Behaviors for Which Students Were Served

Students were mainly served due to truancy issues (65.5 percent of students served). When excluding these students from the analysis, the main reasons expelled students and students at risk for expulsion were served included disobedient/defiant behavior (37.7 percent of students), and detrimental behavior (26.6 percent of students). *CHART 3* provides a breakout of the reasons that expelled students and students at risk for expulsion were served by an EARSS program.



**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021

**Note:** Excludes students served for truancy concerns.

### **Example of Student Need Indicators**

Submitted by a School District Grantee in an Outlying City

*Throughout our district we try to enact "early indicators" in flagging students that may need some of the benefits our program provides. This includes flagging students with frequent, but minor, infractions to the school code of conduct, repeated disrespect towards staff, defiance with use of cell phones in the classroom, confrontations with other students, and many other minor conflicts that arise while on school grounds. Through this process, our staff is able to provide students with assistance as early as possible before they cross over into a place of no return with schoolwork and the need for credit recovery and build positive youth/adult relationships with them. Over time, these relationships allow for a better working environment for students and help them create more positive coping mechanisms.*



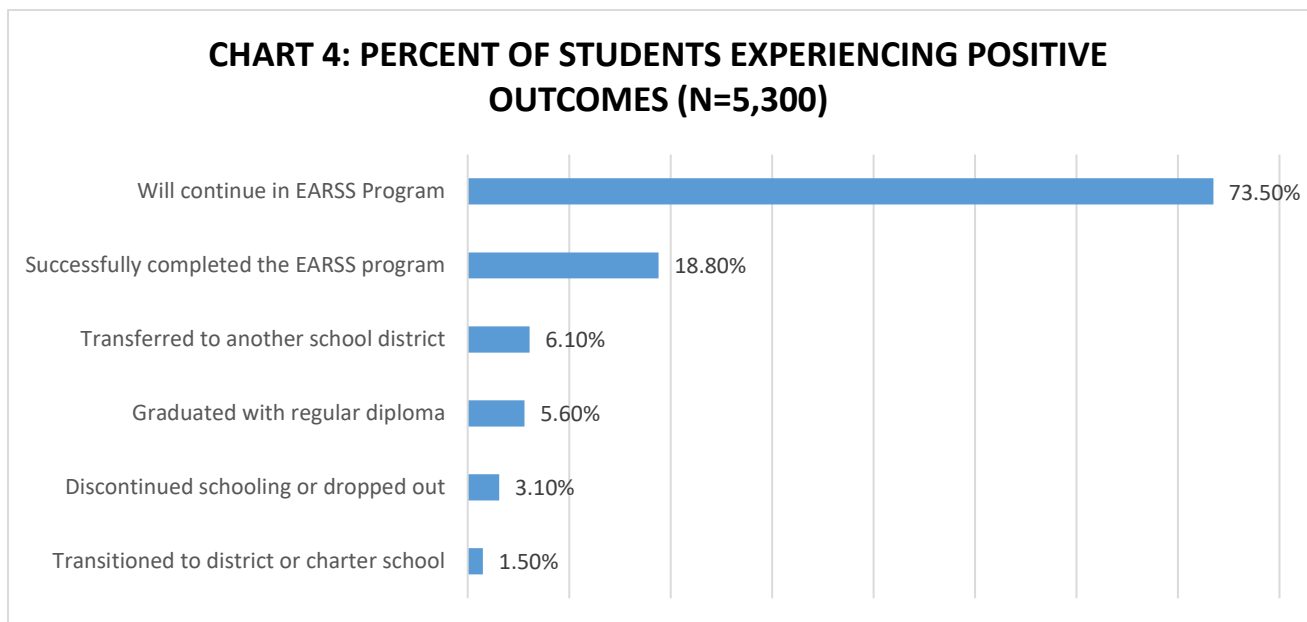
## Program Effectiveness

### Overall Outcomes for All Students

Of the students served by the grant, 80 percent experienced positive outcomes by the end of the 2020-2021 academic year. These outcomes include school completion, continuation of education, completion of the expulsion term and return to school. Grantees in years 1, 2, and 3, on average, reported more positive outcomes for students than grantees in year 4. Grantees in year 1 were more consistent in reporting higher positive outcomes for students. **CHART 4** breaks down the positive outcomes for students served by the EARSS program.

# 4 out of 5

## STUDENTS EXPERIENCED POSITIVE OUTCOMES



**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021

**Note:** Students may experience more than one outcome and be included in more than one category.

### Student Success Story

Submitted by a Denver-Metro School District Grantee

*We want to share the success story of a student that came to us due to a lack of engagement and a poor outlook about school. The student was truant and at-risk to the point of dropping out of school. After the student was enrolled into the program, we were able to help the student retrieve the credit necessary to fulfill graduation requirements as well as provide social and emotional skill-building opportunities. In the short time of the student being with us, not only did the student earn the credit to graduate, both the student and the student's mother have said the program changed their life for the better. The student did not only change their outlook about the school but their outlook about life overall was rejuvenated as well.*



### Dropout Prevention

Students served by the EARSS grant are often at greater risk of dropping out of school due to behavioral and attendance risk factors. In 2020-2021, 3,043 students served were also identified by grantees as at risk of dropping out of school. One long-term aim of the program is to reduce the risk of dropping out of school by providing students with intensive support and reducing the number of students who:

- Miss 20 days or being absent 10 percent of school days
- Receive two or more behavior infractions; and/or
- Fail English or math in 6<sup>th</sup> through 9<sup>th</sup> grade, a GPA of less than 2.0, two or more failures in 9<sup>th</sup> grade courses, or failure to pass 9<sup>th</sup> grade.

Approximately half (47%) of grantees reported no student dropouts. Overall, grantees reported that 163 students dropped out of school in 2020-2021 and had not returned.

### Meeting Legislative Intent

The purpose of the EARSS program is to assist in reducing and preventing expulsions, suspensions, and truancy. Grantees reported the following disciplinary outcomes in 2020-2021:

- **Expulsions:** 99.7 percent of at-risk students who remained in school did not receive an expulsion while being served. Eight out of 10 grantees reported that no students were expelled while being served.
- **Out-of-School Suspensions:** 95.4 percent of at-risk students did not receive an out-of-school suspension while being served. Three out of 10 grantees who served at-risk students reported that no students received an out-of-school suspension while being served.
- **In-School Suspensions:** 95.9 percent of at-risk students did not receive an in-school suspension while being served. Three out of 10 grantees who served at-risk students reported that no students received an in-school suspension while being served.
- **Truancy Petitions:** 95.1 percent of truant students or students at risk for habitual truancy did not have a truancy petition filed in court while being served. Three out of 10 grantees who served habitually truant students reported no petitions filed in court.

#### Facility School Grantees Student Outcomes

Of the students served by facility schools, 56.2 percent experienced positive outcomes.

Only one student served by facility schools dropped out of school.

#### Student Success Story

Submitted by an Outlying Town

*One student comes from a complex home environment, including a parent with criminal history, substance abuse history, domestic violence history, and mental health history. Upon meeting this student, it was expressed that this student wanted help breaking the familial cycle. Collaboratively with school staff, parents, the student, and a counselor, this student has established a plan for an independent future and began initiating new and healthy relationships with peers and teachers. This student has also been able to address academic concerns, self-advocate, and has addressed personal mental health concerns in efforts to heal from the events they have experienced.*



## Program Support Services Implemented

### Most Funded Support Services

Various types of program support services were utilized by grantees to better serve students, including academic and attendance strategies (e.g., credit recovery, online and technology-based learning), behavioral supports (e.g., counseling, mentoring), and emotional supports (e.g., multi-tiered system of support, trauma informed approaches). These grant-funded support services are primarily delivered by specialized staff (e.g., behavior interventionist, student attendance advocates, family liaisons). The 2020-21 year showed an increase from the previous year in wraparound case management, tutoring, and culturally responsive interventions. Due to the ever-changing learning environment, 2020-21 showed a drastic decrease in professional development for staff, when compared to the previous year. **CHART 5** provides a breakout of the most common support services utilized by grantees.

### Facility School Grantees Support Services

Facility schools funded support services similarly to other grantees. However, facility schools reported that **essential skills and positive staff-student mentoring and relationship building** were most effective when serving EARSS students.

**CHART 5: MOST COMMONLY FUNDED SUPPORT SERVICES (N=57)**



**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021

**Note:** Grantees could select more than one support service.

### Most Effective Strategies

Grantees were asked to report on the most effective strategies that have positively impacted their programs. Many of these are defined in statute and are included as part of the grant application (see **Appendix D**). Survey results revealed that the implementation of mentoring/positive relationship building (43 grantees) and restorative justice practices (38 grantees) were the most commonly reported effective strategies. A variety of other strategies were also reported as effective by grantees to meet the unique needs of the population they serve, including wraparound case management. Due to the pandemic, tutoring, extended-day learning, and



online and technology-based learning was considered some of the most effective strategies when moving students toward graduation.

### Program Successes

Grantees were asked to specifically describe special circumstances that positively affected progress on achieving their objectives. When focusing on grantees who were meeting or exceeding most of their goals and reported positive outcomes for at least 80 percent of students served (see [Appendix C](#)), program success was attributed to the following factors:

- Consistent communication and relationship building efforts with parents/families;
- Opportunity to form relationships and work with students outside of normal school hours, often through tutoring and extended day activities; and
- Individualized and relevant educational opportunities focused on student interests.

#### Example Program Success

Submitted by a School District Grantee in an Urban-Suburban Setting

*The most effective strategy has been positive staff-student mentoring and relationship building. These relationships are what make our students want to come to school and keep coming back. They feel respected and valued and this allows them to open up and communicate their concerns, fears, and dreams.*

### Program Challenges

Grantees were also asked to specifically describe circumstances that negatively affected progress on achieving their objectives. Program disruption due to COVID-19 was the most cited challenge with program implementation and achieving program goals in 2020-2021. When focusing on grantees who were not meeting or exceeding their goals, challenges mentioned also included:

- Policy shifts to accommodate COVID restrictions;
- Staff turnover and the amount of time required to fill positions;
- Families and students struggled with engagement or were uninterested in services;
- Limited referral services available for students and families; and
- Life circumstances (e.g., poverty, work schedule, childcare).

#### Example Program Challenge

Submitted by an Outlying Town

*Even though we are rating this performance objective for the 2020-2021 school year, as “not making progress”, we don’t believe this accurately reflects the progress our students would have made if we were not dealing with COVID. At-risk and truant students did not excel when working from a hybrid or remote-only learning model. Without regular in-person daily attendance, it was even harder for these students to spend the time necessary to complete their coursework. In response to this we offered Homework Help, Friday School, and an expanded Summer School. These additional opportunities allowed students to meet the requirements necessary to move to the next grade level.*



## Parent/Family Engagement

### Parents/Guardians Served

In addition to students, grantees reported serving 4,287 parents/guardians of students served. These parents/guardians received support services to assist in their children’s learning and positive development.

# 4,287

PARENTS/GUARDIANS  
SERVED

### Parent/Guardian Services

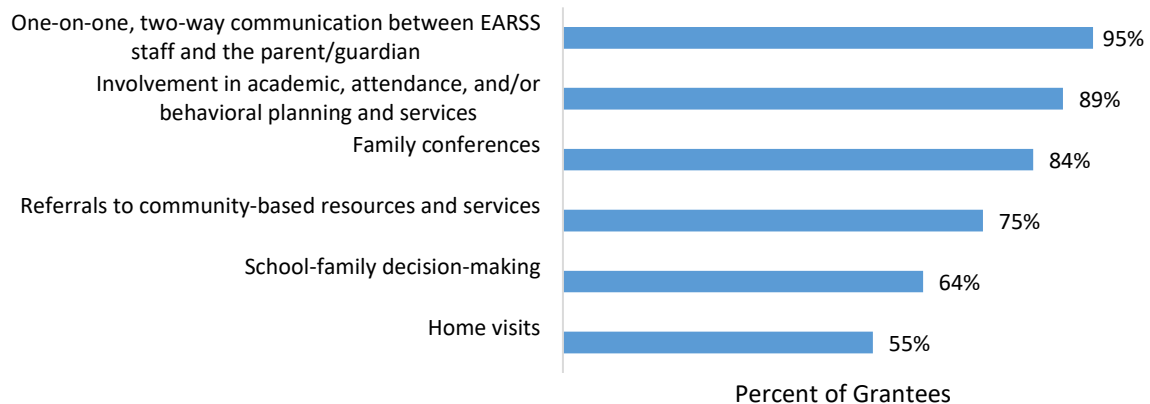
56 grantees provided various support services for parents, guardians, and families. The grantees indicated that the most common support services available to families included communication between staff and families, involving parents/guardians in academic, attendance, and/or behavioral planning, communication, and referrals to community services/social services. **CHART 6** lists the most common family engagement strategies available to parents/guardians.

### Facility School Grantees Parents/Families Served

Facility schools served 7.7 percent of all parents/guardians served (330 parents/guardians).

Facility schools provided support services like those provided by other grantees.

**CHART 6: MOST COMMONLY FUNDED SUPPORT SERVICES FOR PARENTS/GUARDIANS (N=56)**



**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021  
**Note:** Grantees could select more than one support service.



## Performance Objectives and Program Outcomes

Each grantee set or selected performance objectives in three to four core areas to be achieved by the end of the grant period: **Parent-Focused; Academic Performance; Attendance; Safety and Discipline/Behavior.** Grantees annually report progress toward achieving these goals. Grantees were instructed to rate their performance objectives using the following guidance:

- *If you went above and beyond your objective(s), then you exceeded your goal.*
- *If you have completely (100 percent) met your objective(s), then you have met your goal.*
- *If you have partially met your objective (more than 50 percent), then indicate making progress/approaching.*
- *If you have made minimal gains on your objective, select not making progress.*

Due to the impact of COVID-19 on program implementation and data collection, an additional response of *unable to rate performance objective* was included in the 2020-2021 reporting survey. Grantees cited that data was inaccurate due to the frequent disruptions to the learning environment and difficulty serving EARSS students in a remote learning environment.

### Ratings for All Objectives

To better identify how many grantees met or exceeded their objectives, ratings were aggregated by grantees. When focusing on the ratings “exceeding” and “meeting,” the results were the following:

- Four out of 10 grantees met or exceeded at least half of their objectives.
- One out of 10 grantees met or exceeded all their objectives.

To better identify how many objectives were met, data was aggregated across all objective areas. Ratings for all objectives across areas included:

- **Exceeded or Met:** 38.5 percent of the performance objectives were rated as meeting or exceeding.
- **Making Progress:** 34.1 percent of the performance objectives were rated as making progress.
- **Not Making Progress:** 12.7 percent of the performance objectives were rated as not making progress.
- **Unable to Rate:** 14.7 percent of the performance objectives were rated as not able to be rated due to COVID disruptions.

Grantees unable to rate their objectives were prompted to provide a follow-up explanation. The most common programmatic reasons cited included ***disruption in programming, shifts in program priority, or inconsistent practices when implementing programs due to ever changing learning environment.***

### Example Challenge with Program Implementation

Submitted by a School District Grantee in an Outlying City

*Due to the pandemic, it has been a challenge to measure success as students face constant disturbance due to being in a cohort that had to quarantine or being ill from COVID-19. The summer school was offered in-person for 5 weeks for the month in June. We hope to see that the students who participated in school summer show some retention in the Fall.*

### Facility School Grantees Performance Objectives

Five out of eight facility schools reported exceeding, meeting, or making progress on all of their goals.

Facility schools were more likely to meet or exceed their attendance objectives (70 percent of objectives) but were less likely to meet or exceed their parent objectives (29 percent of objectives).





Grantees also reported barriers related to the evaluation of their programs and reporting to CDE. The most common barriers cited included **disrupted or canceled data collections**, changes in programming impacted the **relevance of the objective**, **comparison to baseline data was no longer valid** due to changes in available metrics, and **data accuracy concerns**.

### Example Challenge with Data Reporting

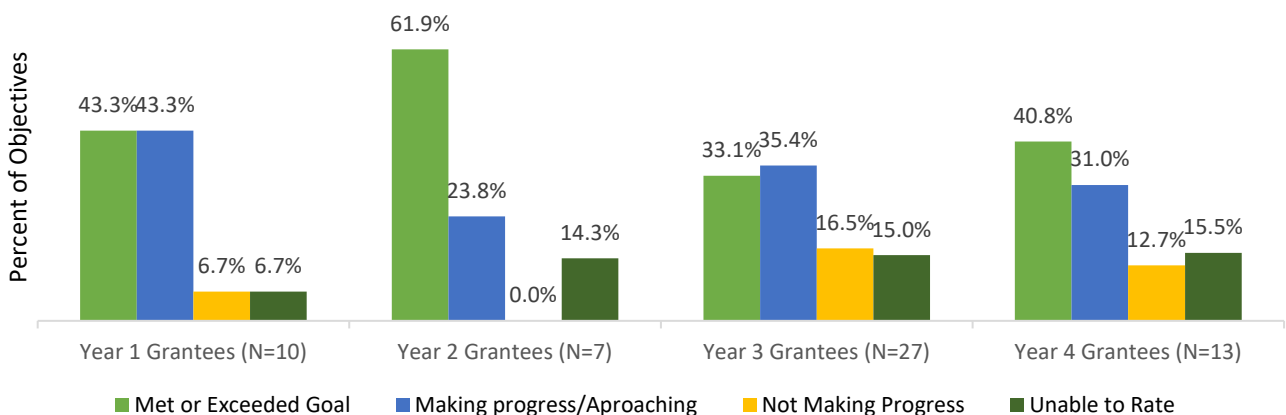
Submitted by a School District Grantee in a Denver Metro

*Disruption due to COVID and quarantine as data entered into Infinite Campus (IC) was skewed school by school and does not accurately progress monitor effectiveness of EARSS program accurately. Attendance reporting in IC was even more inaccurate than academic tracking as schools differed vastly in their definitions of excused and unexcused absence reporting.*

### Ratings for All Objectives by Grant Year

Ratings varied by year of funding. Different from previous years, third and fourth-year grantees were less likely to report having met or exceeded more of their objectives. This is due in part to the performance measures for years one and two focusing on yearly goals that utilized data to determine rating. Year three and four grantees performance evaluated success at the end of a two-year period and was determined by the grantees observations. **CHART 7** shows the percent of rating for all objectives by cohort.

**CHART 7: PERCENT OF RATING FOR ALL OBJECTIVES BY GRANTEE COHORT**

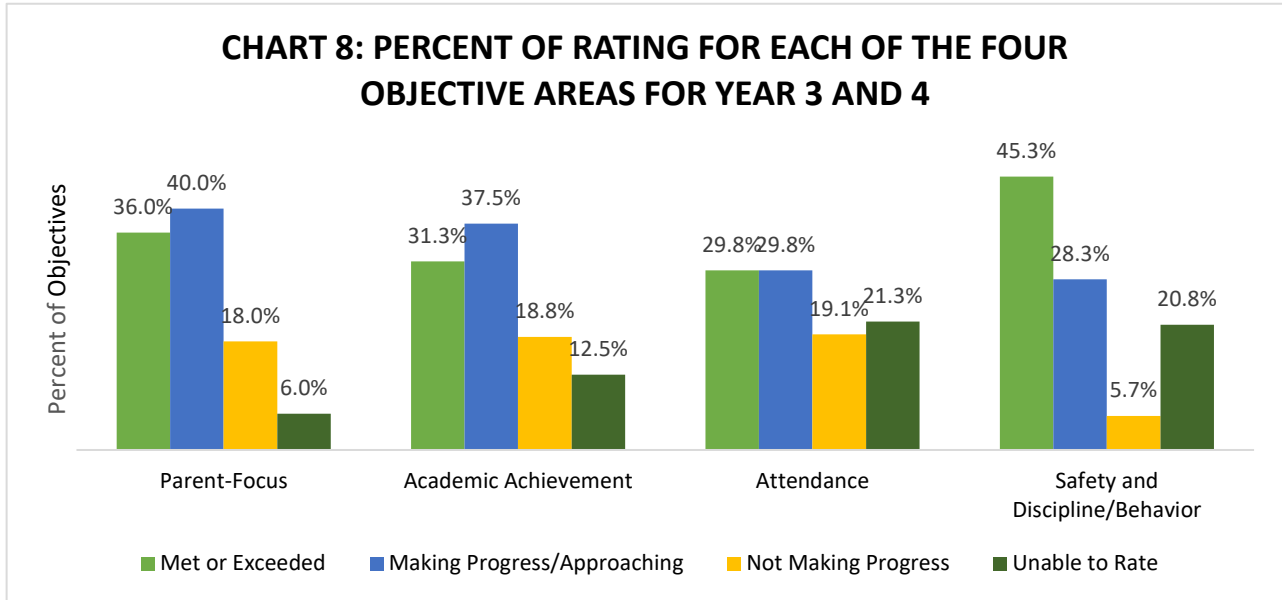


Source: Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021



### Ratings by Objective Areas for Grantees in Year 3 and 4

Continuation grantees (Years 3 and 4) had two performance objectives in each of the following four areas: Parent-Focused; Academic Achievement; Attendance; and Safety and Discipline/Behavior. Overall, grantees were most likely to have met or exceeded their parent focused and discipline objectives. **CHART 8** shows the percent by ratings for each of the four objective areas.



**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021

**Note:** Year 1 and 2 Grantees did not set parent engagement performance objectives.

### Ratings by Objective Areas for Year 1 and 2 Grantees

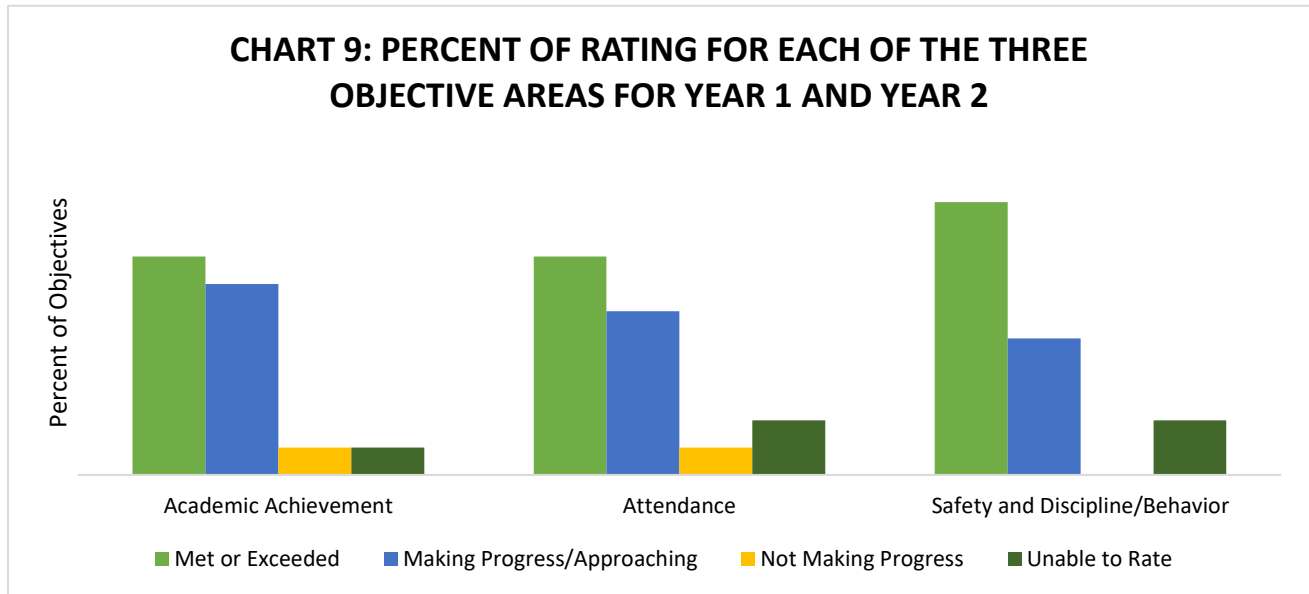
Grantees in their first and second year of the grant were no longer required to set a parent/family-related goal and were required to select department-prescribed performance objectives for academics, attendance, and behavior:

Academic Goal: Students served by the EARSS program will demonstrate improvement in academic achievement.

Attendance Goal: Students participating in the EARSS program will show improvement in attendance.

Behavior Goal: Students participating in the EARSS program will show improvements in behavior.

Grantees were required to select one performance objective for each of the three prescribed goals. Overall, grantees were more likely to rate that they had met or exceeded **CHART 9 shows the percent by ratings for each of the three objective areas.** their behavior objectives than the other areas.



**Source:** Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-2021

**Note:** Year 1 Grantees did not set parent engagement performance objectives.

## Impact of COVID-19 on Programs

In general, the most common implementation challenges reported by grantees in 2020-2021 were directly due to COVID-19. Grantees explained the impact of COVID-19 on learning as part of the reflection regarding not achieving performance objectives.

Results of a thematic analysis of the responses (N=57) revealed that several grantees were negatively impacted due to COVID-19. For example, grantees reported that **academic progress** and **Safety and Discipline/Behavior** **ss likely to be accurately tracked** due to multiple transitions between an in-person model to a blended or remote model and mandated quarantines. This made it difficult for grantees to accurately report on program outcomes.

### **Impact of COVID-19 Example**

Submitted by a School District Grantee in an Urban-Suburban Environment

*Last year proved as an anomaly to comparative data with our move in and out of remote learning and in-person learning. This was coupled with the impact of quarantines and students being absent due to other COVID related variables. In the future, we are putting forward measures to engage students and families more in participating in school culture building events, we will increase the number of parent contacts and home visits, and we are increasing opportunities for students to engage in the policy making process of the school to build student agency. These are all steps that we feel will support the attainment of these goals.*



Grantees also cited that a **decline in services** occurred due to **difficulty with adapting traditionally in-person services, fewer students identified for supports, or discontinued aspects of the programs**. For example, educational group activities for parents, educational field trips for students, family engagement in the school building, and conferences had to be cancelled. Seventy percent of grantees were given a no-cost extension for 2021-2022 since they were unable to fully spend their funds in 2020-2021 due to these disruptions.

### Impact of COVID-19 Example

Submitted by a Denver Metro Grantee

*COVID-19 and the shift towards distance learning caused many disruptions in our students' learning, but the efforts in relationship building, engagement and general supports allowed us to continue teaching during this time of tumult.*

Respondents also reported **limited access to the internet/WIFI** for students and staff and a **decrease in student engagement/increase in disengagement** during the transition from in-person programming to blended or remote programming being a barrier to implementation.

### Impact of COVID-19 Example

Submitted by an Outlying Town Grantee

*There were many times a class had to go remote for a week, a teacher had to quarantine, students were isolated or had to quarantine. And in the midst of all of this, we were managing our online students. Trying to ensure the technology was working, hotspots provided by the district were delivered for internet connectivity, internet hot spots were provided outside school buildings, and attempts were made to engage parents on the student learning platform. This was incredibly difficult.*

However, grantees also reported successes during this time. For example, grantees commonly reported that programs were able to **adapt programming to focus more on student and family engagement** as well as to **fill immediate needs**. Grantees maintained services to the greatest extent possible during this difficult disruption to direct, in-person student services (e.g., check-in calls and virtual visits, using multiple means to track down and engage truant students, and continued one-on-one support to address individual needs, social distancing home visits).

Some respondents also reported that relationships with students **improved due to increased connections with students**.



**Impact of COVID-19 Example**

Submitted by a BOCES Grantee

*Positive staff student mentoring and relationship building was the most effective in achieving performance objectives and student outcomes because students felt both respected and supported. The positive relationships that grew and developed encouraged increased attendance, improved behavior and supported academic growth. The existence of these improved relationships motivated students in that school staff knew them and would work with them and their individual challenges to help them grow and succeed.*

**Impact of COVID-19 Example**

Submitted by a Denver Metro Grantee

*By providing wraparound case management services, we have been able to holistically serve more students in need. Since [school name] serves an at-risk population, we ascribe to the philosophy that every student should have someone at the school to receive support from or to talk to if they need anything. Many children and families need additional follow-up and resources to achieve self-sustainability, which they receive with multiple support staff assigned to their cases.*

*Trauma-informed care and building positive mentorships between staff and students has also proven effective in regard to the overall performance and social-emotional wellbeing of our students. Students feel like they have others to turn to when they need help, whether it be academic or otherwise.*

**Program Sustainability**

**Sustainability Over Time**

Grantees included a plan to sustain their program as part of their proposal for funding. In their proposal, applicants explain how services and programs will continue past the 4-year funding period with no reduction in quality of services.

**Facility School Grantees Sustainability**

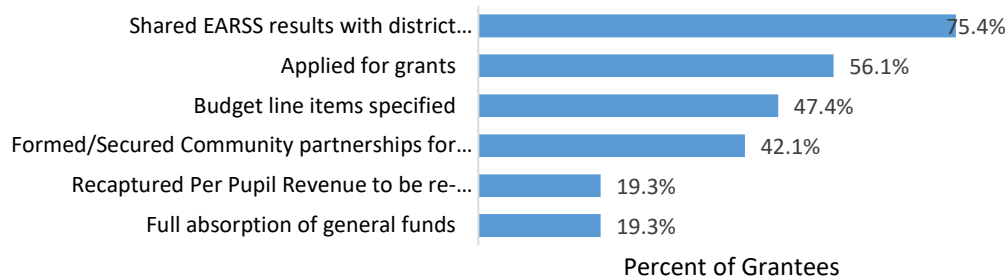
Facility school grantees were more likely than other grantees to report sustaining the EARSS programs by applying for grants (50.0 percent of grantees) and building services into general budget (37.5 percent of grantees)



### Most Common Actions Taken for Sustainability

Grantees were asked to indicate what actions were taken in 2020-2021 to sustain their program. The most common actions taken were related to sharing the results of this evaluation report with district administrators or boards (75.4 percent of grantees), applied for grants (56.1 percent of grantees), and secured funding through specific budget lines (47.4 percent of grantees). **CHART 10** shows the most common sustainability actions taken by grantees.

**CHART 10: MOST COMMON SUSTAINABILITY ACTIONS TAKEN BY GRANTEEES (N=57)**



Source: Colorado Department of Education, EARSS End-of-Year Reporting, 2020-21

### Conclusion

The EARSS program represents the state’s primary investment in reducing expulsions and decreasing truancy and supporting engagement of expelled students and those at risk of suspension or expulsion mainly due to disobedient, defiant, or detrimental behavior. In the 2020-2021 academic school year, more than 6,500 students were served by the EARSS program. Through the years, grantees have explained that the students they serve often have chronic and/or severe challenges, such as adverse childhood experiences, homelessness, or foster care placement. These experiences and challenges can contribute to lower school engagement.<sup>2</sup> Research has repeatedly shown that low school engagement is linked to health risk behaviors (e.g., substance use), delinquency, poor academic achievement, suspension, expulsion, and school dropout.<sup>3,4,5</sup>

Results from the current evaluation revealed that academic and attendance strategies (e.g., credit recovery, online and technology-based learning); behavioral supports (e.g., counseling, mentoring); and system approaches and collaboration (e.g., multi-tiered support systems) contributed to positive results on performance objectives and student outcomes. Grantees reported that the most effective strategies that have positively impacted achieving their performance objectives included positive staff-student mentoring and relationship building, essential skills building, and behavior plans.

COVID-19 impacted programs in several ways (e.g., inability to track student progress, decline in services, fewer students identified for supports, discontinued program aspects) and barriers such as limited access to the internet and a decrease in student engagement were identified during the transition to remote programming. Although disruptions due to COVID-19 occurred, most grantees were able to adapt and leverage their programs to focus more on student and family engagement and filling immediate needs. Grantees were also able to



achieve positive program and student outcomes. Many grantees reported meeting or making progress in meeting their program objectives, especially first- and second-year grantees. Ninety-seven percent of students remained in school.

Due to these funds, grantees reported that, of the students served by this program, 99.7 percent of at-risk students were not expelled, 95.4 percent of at-risk students did not receive an out-of-school suspension, 95.9 percent of at-risk students did not receive an in-school suspension, and 95.1 percent of truant students did not have a truancy petition filed in court.

Research continues to show that exclusionary discipline practices and harsh disciplinary policies disrupt academic achievement and push students out of school. Students who are suspended are more likely to have future challenges in passing classes and with chronic absenteeism.<sup>6</sup> Once a student is suspended or expelled, it increases the odds that the student will receive additional expulsions and suspensions, become involved in the juvenile justice system, and/or experience negative academic outcomes (e.g., school retention, test scores).<sup>7,8</sup> The EARSS program provides opportunities to students who may otherwise not have these supports. Evaluation results for the EARSS programs indicate that the program continues to meet its legislative intent to prevent exclusionary discipline practices such as expulsions and suspensions as well as habitual truancy among students being served by the grant-funded programs and services.



## Endnotes

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- <sup>1</sup> Rosa, J., Krueger, J., Werpy, A., & Kim, A. (2020). *Expelled and At-Risk Student Services Grant Program Evaluation Report*. Retrieved from <https://www.cde.state.co.us/dropoutprevention/earss20182019legislativereport>.
- <sup>2</sup> Robles, A., Gjelsvik, A., Hirway, P., Vivier, P. M., & High, P. (2019). Adverse childhood experiences and protective factors with school engagement. Available in *Pediatrics*, Volume 144(2), e20182945.
- <sup>3</sup> Dolzan, M., Sartori, R., Charkhabi, M., & De Paola, F. (2015). *The effect of school engagement on health risk behaviours among high school students: Testing the mediating role of self-efficacy*. Available in *Procedia-Social and Behavioral Sciences*, Volume 205, Pages 608-613.
- <sup>4</sup> Wang, Ming-Te, and Jennifer A. Fredricks (2014). *The reciprocal links between school engagement, youth problem behaviors, and school dropout during adolescence*. Available in *Child Development*, Volume 85.2, Pages 722-737.
- <sup>5</sup> Finn, J. D., & Zimmer, K. S. (2012). *Student engagement: What is it? Why does it matter?* Available in the *Handbook of Research on Student Engagement*, Springer, Boston, MA.
- <sup>6</sup> Technical Report. *National Dropout Prevention Center/Network (NDPC/N)*.
- <sup>7</sup> Fabelo, T., Thompson, M., Plotkin, M., Carmichael, D. Marchbanks III, M., & Booth, E. (2011). *Breaking Schools' Rules: A Statewide Study of How School Discipline Relates to Students' Success and Juvenile Justice Involvement*. New York: Council of State Governments Justice Center.
- <sup>8</sup> Anderson, K. P., Ritter, G. W., & Zamarro, G. (2019). *Understanding a vicious cycle: The relationship between student discipline and student academic outcomes*. Available in *Educational Researcher*, Volume 48(5), Pages 251-262.
- <sup>9</sup> Novak, A. (2019). *The school-to-prison pipeline: An examination of the association between suspension and justice system involvement*. Available in *Criminal Justice and Behavior*, Volume 46(8), Pages 1165-1180.
- <sup>10</sup> Augustine, C., Engberg, A., Grimm, G., Lee, E., Lin Wang, E., Christianson, K., & Joseph, A. (2018). *Can Restorative Practices improve school climate and curb suspension? An evolution of the impact of Restorative Practices in a mid-sized urban school district*. Santa Monica, CA: RAND Corporation. 10.7249/RR2840.





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## **Appendix A – Evaluation Methodology**

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### **Data Collection**

Evaluation data were collected from all 57 grantees funded by the EARSS program. Grantees were responsible for submitting their End-of-Year Survey to CDE using a Qualtrics survey platform. In addition, they were required to securely submit State Assigned Student Identifiers (SASIDs) for all students served using the Student Engagement Evaluation Data Collection (SEEDC) in Data Pipeline.

The results reported in this document reflect data collected at the end of the 2020-2021 school year. Two webinars were conducted to prepare grantees to collect and enter data. Recorded versions of the webinars were also shared with all grantees. Throughout the reporting period, CDE staff were available to assist with problems and answer questions.

The CDE staff analyzed the data for any irregularities and conducted mathematical checks to correctly calculate and tabulate data. If data were not accurate, CDE staff would contact the grantee for clarification and revisions. These strategies ensure that year-end reporting is as accurate as possible.

### **Analysis**

Aggregated data from the materials collected was downloaded from the SEEDC and Qualtrics systems as Excel spreadsheets by CDE staff, which facilitated the statistical analysis of process and outcome data. All Personally Identified Information (PII) data was handled and stored securely in accordance with CDE guidelines. Using disaggregated and aggregated data, CDE staff conducted quantitative (i.e., descriptive statistics and inferential statistics) and qualitative analyses (i.e., thematic analysis). When appropriate, inferential analyses included an investigation of differences by grant year and student type. Due to the unique nature of facility schools, additional analyses were conducted focused on those grantees.



**Appendix B – 2020-2021 Funded Grantees**

County*	Year of 4-year grant	Grantee	School or Program funded, or District-wide Strategies	Grantee Type	Amount Awarded
Adams	1	Adams 12	EARSS 2021 to 2024 Program	School District	\$362,168
Boulder	1	Boulder Valley	Advanced Alternative Learning Program and Services	School District	\$312,452
Centennial	1	Centennial School District R-1	EARSS 2021 to 2024 Program	School District	\$160,980
Jefferson	1	CSI - Early College of Arvada	EARSS Advocacy Case Management	Charter School	\$110,590
Denver	1	Denver Public Schools	DPS EARSS Program	School District	\$222,134
Denver	1	DPS - Denver Justice High School	Denver Justice High EARSS Program	Charter School	\$189,020
Jefferson	1	Jefferson Hills Academy	EARSS 2021 to 2024 Program	Facility School	\$90,000
Lincoln	1	Limon School District RE-4J	Lincoln County RAD-C	School District	\$82,000
Alamosa	1	San Luis Valley BOCES	SLV EARSS 2021-2024	BOCES	\$372,121
Adams	1	School District 27J	EARSS 2021-2024 Middle School Tier 3 Program	School District	\$327,150
Boulder	1	Boulder Valley	Boulder Prep High School EARSS Program	Charter School	\$91,655
Douglas	1	Douglas County	DCSD Student Assistance Grant	School District	\$385,950



County*	Year of 4-year grant	Grantee	School or Program funded, or District-wide Strategies	Grantee Type	Amount Awarded
Kit Carson	2	Arriba-Flagler CSD #20	Kit Carson Co EARSS 2020-23	School District	\$110,212
Saguache	2	Mountain Valley	EARSS 2020-2023	School District	\$91,228
Larimer	2	Poudre	Poudre District Smart Start	School District	\$199,570
Conejos	2	South Conejos	EARSS 2020-2023	School District	\$179,377
Rio Grande	2	Upper Rio Grande School District	URGSD EARSS	School District	\$91,994
Adams	3	Adams County School District 14	Middle School Mentoring	School District	\$147,900
Adams, Arapahoe	3	Adams-Arapahoe 28J	APS Avenues Program	School District	\$120,657
El Paso	3	Atlas Preparatory School	At-risk Student Services	Charter School	\$169,659
La Plata	3	Durango School District	Restorative Practices Expansion	School District	\$266,139
Jefferson	3	Jefferson County R1	EARSS Program	School District	\$306,421
Boulder	3	Justice High School - Lafayette	EARSS Program	Charter School	\$213,000
Rio Grande	3	Monte Vista School District	Monte Vista Family Involvement	School District	\$109,331
Denver	3	Mount Saint Vincent	Refocus Restorative Practices Program	Facility School	\$182,204
Adams, Jefferson, Denver	3	Charter School Institute	New America School Attendance Casework	Charter School	\$225,823
Arapahoe	3	Sheridan School District	High School System of Support	School District	\$365,388
Boulder	3	St. Vrain Valley Schools	Credit Recovery	School District	\$256,468
Denver	3	Tennyson Center for Children	EARSS Life Skills	Facility School	\$141,866



County*	Year of 4-year grant	Grantee	School or Program funded, or District-wide Strategies	Grantee Type	Amount Awarded
Adams	3	Westminster Public Schools	Intensive Services - Case Management	School District	\$225,823
Saguache	3	Center Consolidated Schools	EARSS - Districtwide	School District	\$241,098
Denver	3	Charter School Institute	New Legacy	Charter School	\$148,448
El Paso +	3	Education reEnvisioned BOCES	Pikes Peak Online School	BOCES	\$83,920
Mineral	3	Creede School District	Restorative Practices	School District	\$89,214
Fremont	3	Fremont RE-2	ATS, RJ & Family Outreach	School District	\$131,857
Garfield	3	Garfield County School District No. 16	Wraparound Services	School District	\$150,000
Lake	3	Lake County School District	EARSS - LCIS and LCHS	School District	\$118,580
Saguache	3	Moffat Consolidated School District 2	EARSS - Districtwide	School District	\$114,154
Moffat	3	Moffat County School District RE-1	MCHS-EARSS Program	School District	\$133,648
Garfield	3	Roaring Fork Schools	Truancy Reduction	School District	\$150,000
El Paso	3	Roundup Fellowship	Behavior Intervention	Facility School	\$67,000
BOCES	3	San Juan BOCES	BETA Program	BOCES	\$135,321
Weld	3	Weld County School District Re-3J	Wrap-Around Services	School District	\$245,561
Teller	3	Woodland Park School District	Restorative Practices	School District	\$112,155
Archuleta	4	Archuleta School District	K-4 Stepping Stones	School District	\$54,068
El Paso	4	Calhan School District	School of Challenge and Opportunity	School District	\$47,448



County*	Year of 4-year grant	Grantee	School or Program funded, or District-wide Strategies	Grantee Type	Amount Awarded
Denver	4	Charter School Institute	New America School - Tiered Behavior Intervention	Charter School	\$103,913
Denver	4	Denver Children's Home	Bansbach Academy	Facility School	\$85,413
Denver	4	Denver Public Schools	Compass Academy	Charter School	\$109,503
El Paso	4	District 49	Community Engagement Advocate	School District	\$35,483
Arapahoe	4	Englewood School District	Secondary Restorative Practices	School District	\$82,897
El Paso	4	Fountain-Fort Carson School District 8	Welte Education Center Support	School District	\$54,200
Prowers	4	Lamar School District RE-2	EARSS Supportive Interventions	School District	\$202,785
Mesa	4	Mesa County Valley School District 51	Trauma Informed Behavior Coaches	School District	\$153,000
Fremont	4	Southern Peaks Regional Treatment Center	Phoenix Academy	Facility School	\$19,147
Denver	4	Tennyson Center for Children	ARC Framework	Facility School	\$57,125
Larimer	4	Turning Point - The Waverly School	The Bridges Program	Facility School	\$126,938

\* **Note:** County refers to where the city of administration was located. It might not reflect all counties receiving services per grantee.



## Appendix C – Example Program Summaries

Below is a list of all grantees and summaries of their programs of the grantees who reported positive outcomes for 80 percent or more of students served and reported having met or exceeded at least 75 percent of their performance objectives in 2020-2019. **Note:** *the below information was summarized from program descriptions submitted along with the initial grant applications.*

Grantee	Program Summary
<b>Calhan School District</b>	The academic support program serves about 28 percent of the district’s secondary students and those of neighboring districts at risk of expulsion, truancy, and dropout. The program provides credit recovery, vocational training, and counseling for students, parents, and families. The goal of the program is to foster greater student attachment to school and increase postsecondary readiness.
<b>Center Consolidated Schools</b>	The Center School District supports four schools - Haskin Elementary, Skoglund Middle School, Center High School, and Alternative Recovery Center. The district goals are to increase parental engagement, decrease the number of students with failed grades, decrease habitual truancy, and decrease behavioral referrals. Selected strategies include parent education and home visits, tutoring, credit recovery, after-school program, restorative practices, and social-emotional learning.
<b>Creede School District</b>	The district-wide restorative practices program and Career and Technical programs was implemented to replace punitive systems and to provide restorative practices and educational services to secondary students and parents.
<b>Denver Children’s Home</b>	Denver Children's Home's PIVOT (Providing Improved Value Over Time) program will provide multi- dimensional support services to help students successfully transition to a less restrictive educational environment while providing the tools and skills needed to avoid future suspension and expulsion. This will be achieved through improving the capacity of parents and caregivers, enhancing academic support via credit recovery and individualized education supports, stronger school and community collaborations and more closely supporting students through their transition period.
<b>Lamar School District RE-2</b>	Lamar School District provides at-risk students in Lamar High School (grades 9-12) and Lamar Middle School (grades 6-8) support services to avoid expulsion and reduce truancy such as early truancy intervention by an Individualized Service and Support Team and community collaboration to identify and resolve barriers in school attendance.
<b>Mount Saint Vincent</b>	The ReFocus Restorative Practices Program provides evidence-based restorative practices and trauma-informed services to child survivors of abuse, neglect, and mental illness. The program embeds restorative practices within the school by training and coaching teachers, mental health workers, students, and parents/guardians, and by providing in-school suspension to prevent students from missing school.
<b>Tennyson Center for Children</b>	Tennyson provides traumatized students at-risk for poor school performance and behaviors leading to suspension, expulsion, and/or habitual truancy with specialized services to reintegrate into a less restrictive educational setting, typically public school. The Pathways Program includes internship opportunities for 200 youth over four years ages 12+ in acquiring proven academic, life, and workforce skills.



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## Appendix D - Most Effective Strategies

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EARSS program evaluations have identified the following activities and strategies as most effective in contributing toward meeting grantees' performance goals.

### **Attendance Contracts**

Refers to written agreements to address attendance issues. Often includes strategies to address barriers to attendance and action plans to improve attendance.

### **Behavioral Plans**

Refers to action plans to address behavioral and truancy issues. Plans should be developed in coordination with students, parents, school personnel and community-based providers.

### **Course Completion/Credit recovery**

Refers to programs/activities that allow a student to continue earning course credits and to advance toward graduation and/or facilitates accrual of credits, especially in core courses (math, science, reading and social studies). May include self-paced digital content or online programs.

### **Counseling**

Refers to social-emotional counseling that may be school-based or community-based and is provided by qualified school staff or other counseling professionals.

### **Online and Technology-Based Learning**

In this context, refers to a full-time Online Education Program, which in Colorado is defined as ..."a non-religious, non-sectarian full-time online education program or school authorized by..., that delivers a sequential program of synchronous or asynchronous instruction from a teacher to a student primarily through the use of technology via the internet in a virtual or remote setting. It is not an online program if there is not a teacher at a distance, who is responsible for the grading and teaching of the student, and there is not instruction over the internet."

### **Positive Staff-Student Mentoring and Relationships**

Refers to one-on-one or small group mentoring by staff and student connections to a caring adult. Strategies and activities may include, but not limited to advising, coaching, problem solving, and self-esteem building. This is often done by grant-funded FTE such as behavior interventionists, attendance advocates, family liaisons, tutors, mentors, counselors, and social workers, etc. Often involves a case management structure

### **Restorative Practices (in response to or as an alternative to exclusionary discipline)**

A formal process, facilitated by trained mediators in restorative justice, that allows students to understand the harm caused, who it affected and how to repair it. It provides support and opportunity to resolve student conflicts and misconduct.

### **Trauma Informed Approach**

Implementation of explicit recognition, understanding, and responsiveness to trauma with intentional efforts made in utilizing evidence-based practices to build healthy relationships, restore emotional safety, and create positive opportunities where students can practice self-regulation strategies and prosocial skills.

### **Wraparound case management**

Refers to an approach based on a team of people who come together around family strengths and needs to create unique interventions and supports based on a process of unconditional care. Family participation in decision-making is a key component. Involves provision of services and interventions to both students and parents\* and activities that facilitate family access to needed community services.

\*In the EARSS context, families are to be served through inter-agency agreements, not with EARSS funds.