

# Great Public Schools and Closing The Achievement Gap

## Colorado

Great Public Schools Criteria refers to the seven elements needed for closing the achievement gaps and raising achievement for all students. The seven elements are: (1) readiness to learn, (2) high expectations, (3) quality conditions, (4) qualified staff, (5) accountability, (6) parental involvement, and (7) funding.

Read more below about the Great Public Schools Criteria in Colorado.

### Readiness to Learn

**Quality Public Pre-K Programs.** In an effort to reduce the dropout rate in the state, the Colorado Preschool Program (CPP) began in 1988. While some CP funds are used to provide full-day kindergarten in certain districts (serving 1,494 children in 2002-2003), funding is used primarily to provide at-risk children with a half-day, comprehensive pre-kindergarten program. Additional funding sources, such as federal Head Start funds, may be combined with state CPP funds to extend the length of the program day or to provide extra services to children. Only public schools may receive funding directly from the state. Local school districts may subcontract with Head Start and community based child care providers to provide CPP classes. A consortium of statewide organizations has been formed to create the framework for a cohesive, effective early childhood system in Colorado. This Early Childhood State System Team includes representatives from the Colorado Department of Education, the Colorado Department of Human Services, the Colorado Department of Public Health and Environment, Educare, and a number of other organizations. Activities of the consortium include work on a public engagement campaign and a plan for measuring outcomes within the early childhood system. (NIEER)

Migrant Preschool Program Services are provided to approximately 700 three-, four-, and five-year-old children through the federal migrant program. These programs are all operated during the migrant season in five sites. Any child of a migrant family is eligible for this program. (CDE)

**Kindergarten.** A Colorado State Bill that would change the age range for compulsory school attendance from 7-17 to 6-17 was recently referred to the Appropriations committee. The bills' sponsors argue that starting children's education early is important so they don't fall behind in academic achievement and that requiring six-year-olds to attend will ultimately reduce the need for remedial education and improve their overall academic achievement. They also argue that requiring 17-year-olds to attend will help improve graduation rates and reduce dropout rates. (CEA)

Another bill that has passed in the house would authorize districts, with voter approval, to go beyond the statutory cap on mill levy limits to provide funding for the district's excess full-day kindergarten costs beyond funding from the Legislature. (CEA)

Full-day Kindergarten:

- State Policy: Colorado provides fewer hours per year for full-day kindergarten than for 1<sup>st</sup> grade and districts are not required to offer it. Colorado provides less funding for full-day than for half-day kindergarten. Pupil attendance is not mandatory.
- Definition, District Offering and Pupil Attendance: Colorado requires 450 hour per year for half-day kindergarten and 900 hours per year for full-day kindergarten. Districts are not required to offer full-day kindergarten and children are not required to attend.

- Funding: Colorado provides the same level of funding for both half-day and full-day kindergarten.  
Source: Education Commission of the States (ECS) Kindergarten Database, 2007

## Quality Conditions

**Safe Schools.** Safe School grants are available to local school districts that apply for them as part of NCLB. According to the *No Child Left Behind Act of 2001*, school districts receiving Title IV, Part A .Safe and Drug-Free Schools and Communities, federal funds are required to establish measurable goals toward reducing violence and illegal drug use in schools. Districts also are required to periodically evaluate programs and activities to assess their progress toward those measurable goals.

**Technology.** According to *Education Week's* "Technology Counts 2005" report on Colorado has 4.2 students per computer and 10.4 students per computer in the classroom. The article also reports 4.8 students per computer connected to the internet and 11.1 students per Internet connected computer in the classroom. Colorado is piloting computer based assessments. The Colorado State Education Department's Web site offers a comprehensive list of public and private grant monies available to public schools to increase access, use and understanding of technology. One such grant is the EDS Technology Grant Program, which helps teachers of children ages 6-18 purchase information technology products and services that will improve their students' ability to learn. The \$1,500 grants are awarded to teachers through their schools.

## Parental Involvement

Schools as Community Centers. Like many states, Colorado has focused most funds for parental involvement in the 21st Century Learning Centers—a competitive grant program that has been transferred to the state level. The purpose of this important program is to establish or expand community learning centers that provide students, particularly those who attend high-poverty and low-performing schools, with academic enrichment opportunities along with activities designed to complement the students' regular academic program.

Community learning centers must also offer families of these students' literacy and related educational development. Centers, which can be located in elementary or secondary schools or other similarly accessible facilities, provide a range of high-quality services during non-school hours or periods when school is not in session (such as before and after school, or during summer break). These services support student learning and development and may include: tutoring/mentoring, homework help, academic enrichment (such as hands-on science or technology programs), community service opportunities, as well as music, arts, sports and cultural activities.

Local Education Agencies (LEAs) and public or private organizations are eligible to apply for a 21st CCLC grant. Colorado 21st Century Community Learning Centers (CCLC's) must submit a short (5-10 page) narrative of their activities during the program year for which they received funding (2005-06) by May 15, 2006. This narrative must address context of work, progress of work, quality of work, lessons learn/ongoing refinement of work, and broad categories of expenditures.

## Funding

School funding systems must provide adequate, equitable, and sustainable funding. Making taxes fair and eliminating inefficient and ineffective business subsidies are essential prerequisites to achieving adequacy, equity, and stability in school funding. ESEA programs should be fully funded at their authorized levels.

## Recruitment and Retention

Colorado has state policies that support loan and loan forgiveness programs, alternative routes to certification, induction, and classroom discipline programs. In addition, the state supports programs for teacher recognition and license reciprocity. Statewide teacher career growth policies are also in place.

**Statewide Financial Incentives:** Colorado offers a Loan Incentive for Teachers (LIFT) that's funded by CollegeInvest and established by the Colorado Commission on Higher Education. The program helps teachers in high-demand disciplines repay their student loans. Qualified teachers can get up to \$2000 a year toward loan repayment for up to four years. In addition, Colorado offers a loan and loan forgiveness program. Source: CCHE [Loan Incentives for Teachers \(LIFT\)](#).

**Alternative Routes to Certification:** Alternative Teacher Licensing Program and the Teacher in Residence Program are programs in compliance with the Colorado Performance Based Standards, adopted by the State Board of Education. Each program is operated separately and the state facilitates the licensing of teachers at the completion of each method.

**Teaching Opportunities for Retired Teachers:** A retiree may receive a salary or other compensation without reduction in the pension or retirement benefit payments if employment for full days and half days does not exceed 110 full days during the calendar year; hourly employment does not exceed 720 hours during the calendar year; and employment consisting of a combination of full-day, half-day, and hourly employment does not exceed 110 full days per calendar year. Source: CRS §22-64-111 and 211

**Induction Policies:** Any approved induction program for initial teacher or special services licensees may include supervision by mentor special services providers, ongoing professional development and training, including ethics and performance evaluations. The induction program may be extended if deemed necessary by the school district provided the program does not exceed three years. Source: CRS §22-60.5-204 and 213

**Maximum Class Size Policies:** Colorado's voluntary class size reduction policy guideline applies to grades K-3 only and is 17:1. If a school district has any K-3 classes with a student-to-teacher ratio exceeding 17:1 and chooses not to use the 1 percent increase in funding to decrease class size, the school district must explain why they believe that class size reduction in early grades should not be a priority for the use of the 1 percent increase. Source: CRS §22-32-109.6

**Classroom Discipline Policies:** Each school district must include in its discipline code procedures to inform the student and the parents or guardian when disciplinary information is communicated and provide a copy of disciplinary information to the student and the student's parent or guardian. In addition, state policy establishes explicit grounds for student suspension, expulsion, and denial of admission. The Colorado Teacher and School Administrator Protection Act provides school district administrators and other school district employees from meritless lawsuits and reinforces their authority to maintain safety in the public school classroom and ensures they do not hesitate to exercise such authority. Source: CRS §22-32-109.1 and 126 and §22-33-106. Source: CRS §22-32-109.1(9) and §22-12-101 through 109

**Requirements for Tenure:** A tenured teacher has completed three full years of continuous employment with the employing school district and who has been reemployed for the fourth year. Source: CRS §22-63103

**Rights of Tenure:** A teacher may be dismissed for physical or mental disability, neglect of duty, unsatisfactory performance, insubordination, or other good and just cause. However, a teacher may not be dismissed for temporary illness, leave of absence previously approved by the state board, or military leave of absence. Source: CRS §22-63301

**State Retirement Policies:** Every Colorado school district may create a school teachers' retirement fund controlled by the board of education of the school district concerned. All teachers who are retired from service of Colorado school districts who have served at least 20 years in Colorado school districts and are at least 65 are eligible for retirement. The board of education in any school district is authorized to pay out of such retirement funds a sum not less than \$50 per month to any teacher who has reached the age of 55 while in the service of the school district and who has been in active service as a teacher for 25 years, of which not less than 15 years has been within the district. Source: CRS §22-64-101, 102, 108, 210, 220 and 221. Source: CRS §22-64-102 and 110

**Teacher Recognition Programs or Policies:** There are four educator recognition programs under the Colorado Department of Education: Teacher of the Year, Milken Family Foundation National Educator, Title I Distinguished Teacher of the Year, and Colorado Educator Talent Pool.

**Teacher Exchange Opportunities:** The board of a school district has authority to provide for the exchange of teachers with a school district in this state or in another state or with a foreign government or agency thereof. The salary of the teacher exchanged may be paid by the school district which authorized the exchange and, if so, said teacher shall be paid no less than the rate to which he would otherwise be entitled had he performed services in said school district.

**License Reciprocity with Other States:** A Colorado Initial License may be issued to out-of-state applicants, whose qualifications meet or exceed the requirements of the Colorado State Board of Education, including:

- Completion of an appropriate degree, experience and educational level for the license and endorsement requested.
- Completion of a state-approved program at an accepted out-of-state institution in the endorsement area sought.
- Completion of other state authorized educator preparation programs, including alternative teacher preparation programs.
- Holds or is eligible to hold a standard certificate/license issued by the state education agency or meets the requirements of the legally designated licensing agency of the preparing state.
- Evidence of satisfactory completion of the Colorado State Board of Education adopted assessments appropriate to the license requested. Or evidence of three years of more of teaching experience in another state where reciprocity was granted.

**Certification/Licensure of Educators from Outside the State:** A Provisional Colorado License may be issued to an applicant from another state or country who has met the following:

- Has completed the appropriate degree, experience and educational level for the license and endorsement requested as specified by Colorado standards.
- Has completed a state-approved program at an accepted out-of-state institution in the endorsement area sought.
- Holds or is eligible to hold a standard license or certificate from the preparing state.
- Has passed the PLACE assessment required.