



## Creating a System of High-Quality Education Options to Serve All Students

Denver, Colorado | February 15-17, 2017  
American Youth Policy Forum Study Tour Brief

### Overview

With passage of the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA), there is a continued emphasis on ensuring all young people have access to high-quality educational opportunities that prepare them for success in postsecondary education and the workforce. For states and districts, this means developing an array of high-quality educational options for vulnerable student populations, including alternative education settings, and holding all settings accountable. On February 15-17, 2017 the American Youth Policy Forum (AYPF) led a [study tour](#) of approximately 30 participants in Denver, CO with the purpose of exploring how states can leverage opportunities under ESSA to create a system of high quality alternative education settings to serve all students. Participants included state legislative staff, state department of education staff, district leaders, state board of education members, and leaders of partner organizations from Kentucky, Ohio, Oklahoma, Oregon, and Washington, as well as a few participants affiliated with national organizations.

During the tour, the group visited three alternative school settings and had the opportunity to speak with school staff and students. The trip also included multiple panel presentations from local leaders to provide context and knowledge surrounding Colorado's efforts to support students in all settings, facilitated discussion among the larger group to provide avenues for communication between states about challenges and best-practices, and time for debrief sessions among state teams.

### Opening Dinner and Welcome from Colorado

*Katy Anthes, Commissioner, Colorado Department of Education (CDE)*

Dr. Anthes emphasized that a strong foundation of legislation and statutory policy has allowed their Department of Education (CDE) to support students in a multitude of ways. One example of this foundation is the [Colorado Education Accountability Act of 2009](#), which expanded the state performance indicators, created infrastructure for performance reporting, and increased CDE support available to districts. This legislative foundation was developed through the "collaborative spirit" of bipartisan support, and open communication between the legislature, CDE, and the Colorado State Board of Education. Anthes added that the legislation was designed to facilitate effective practice, rather than as a prescription. CDE engaged in a robust statewide conversation regarding high school graduation, including input from stakeholders to help define minimum graduation requirements that aligned with postsecondary and workforce readiness goals, yet continues to allow districts to customize and develop pathways for their students. This [menu of options](#) includes demonstrating college and career readiness through testing like the ACT or SAT, and through other methods including concurrent enrollment or capstone projects. Colorado is also one of a few states that calculates and reports four, five, six, and seven year graduation rates and has been doing so since 2008, and allows districts and schools to use the best of four, five, six, or seven year graduation rates for accountability.

Anthes also addressed CDE's approach to implementing the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). CDE is using ESSA to support state strategies already in place, and is taking stock of stakeholder opinion and will incorporate that feedback in the development of new state plans and legislation. ESSA has also challenged CDE to reflect on how they support low-performing schools and how they can improve this support. Although Colorado is primarily locally controlled, CDE has been evolving into more of a service agency, sharing their expertise and working in partnership with districts.

**Presentation: Understanding Colorado's Efforts: Reengagement, Student Supports, and Structured Pathways**

*Judith Martinez, Director of Dropout Prevention and Engagement, Colorado Department of Education*

*Gretchen Morgan, Chief Learning Officer, CareerWise*

*Steve Dobo, CEO and President, Zero Dropouts*

This panel session served as an opportunity to more deeply examine the state context that Commissioner Anthes shared. The three presenters offered insight into the development of structured and supported pathways for all students, strengthened through industry, philanthropic, and other cross-sector partnerships.

Judith Martinez, Director of the [Office of Dropout Prevention and Re-engagement](#) at CDE noted that by developing a system that focuses on every student, especially those with unique challenges, Colorado has created a multi-tiered system of support that provides various levels of interventions. Echoing Commissioner Anthes' comments, Martinez highlighted that strong leadership from Governor Ritter, starting in 2007, made reengagement and dropout prevention a priority in the state. Ritter set forth a commitment to cut the state's dropout rate in half in ten years. The first five years of these efforts involved analyzing data to identify not only who was dropping out, but also why students were dropping out. Martinez and her colleagues were able to learn a lot from disaggregating data for special populations, such as youth involved in the juvenile justice system, and piloting interventions. There were common challenges that emerged in serving highly mobile and vulnerable populations such as those in foster care or students experiencing homelessness. Challenges centered on transportation (getting to school and special activities); transitions (educational stability for students who change schools outside of natural progressions); and transfer of records and transcripts for out-of-school youth that seek to re-enroll and re-engage in their education. This systems approach in paying attention to "every student" is leading to high-quality education for all students, as demonstrated in the development of the [Foster Care Education Program](#) and the [Single Point of Contact \(SPOC\) model](#) that supports the transition to, and completion of college for students experiencing homelessness.

Gretchen Morgan, Chief Learning Officer at [CareerWise](#), began by providing an overview of the labor market and workforce opportunities for youth in Colorado. Although the state is experiencing huge amounts of job growth, especially among middle skill jobs, youth unemployment is between 7-9% compared to 3% overall unemployment. CareerWise, a statewide youth apprenticeship system, seeks to unite siloed workforce and education efforts to provide high school students with skills they need to be successful in today's economy. CareerWise uses the Swiss Apprenticeship System as a model for their work. Swiss companies hire apprentices not as a form of philanthropy, but rather because these youth serve as important members of their workforce. In some Swiss companies, apprentices make up 10% of their workforce. Swiss apprentices bring innovation, provide greater productivity than the cost of employing and training new employees, and allow companies to offer tailored training to fit their needs.

As a pilot program, CareerWise is set to launch this summer with students participating in three-year apprenticeships that begin in their junior year of high school. A wide range of companies are hiring

apprentices in occupations in business operations, financial services, advanced manufacturing, and technology. Employers participate for a variety of reasons: in an effort to diversify their workforce, to fill specific middle skill job gaps, or to prepare for an impending cohort's retirement. All CareerWise apprenticeships result in a living wage job, one or more professional credentials, three years of work experience, a professional network and between 24 and 40 college credits, 12 of which are guaranteed transfer courses accepted at all public 4-year universities in Colorado. Morgan challenged participants to think differently about the multiple pathways possible for students when we think of workforce skills and education as inextricably linked.

*"The staff balance serving as a support system for students, while also motivating us to recognize our individual potential."*

– Gateway to College Student

Steve Dobo, founder and president of [Zero Dropouts](#) and founder of [Colorado Youth for a Change \(CYC\)](#) and Futures Academy, offered his perspective on how to create structured and supportive pathways for students, given his immense experience working with Colorado's most vulnerable populations. Dobo expanded upon the previous discussion of education and workforce silos, highlighting the need for many students to work while also attending school. He also discussed successes in workforce agencies of "on-ramping" students through a tiered model where students start with temporary positions and work toward full time positions – models in which employment is not only the outcome, but also a support. Dobo also encouraged participants to consider how technology can be used to amplify this work, how data can be used to inform programmatic structures, and emphasized the importance of sustainable and scalable systems.

In closing, each panelist shared what they believed is the most important lever in creating a common mission among stakeholders for structured and supportive pathways. Morgan shared that CareerWise is "business driven and student centered," and that their business foundation allows their movement to be sustainable. Martinez noted that a shared vision and data for evidence are integral to finding common ground. Dobo remarked that strong leadership from the Governor's office was a key to Colorado's success.

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*Note: Please see Appendix A for complete descriptions of each school visited. This document can also be found [here](#).*

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### **School Visit: Gateway to College at Front Range Community College**

The first school visit of the study tour was the [Gateway to College program at Front Range Community College \(FRCC\)](#) located in Westminster, CO. The program works in partnership with local area school districts to serve youth ages 16-21 years old who have dropped out of high school or are significantly behind in credits and unlikely to graduate. Students work toward their high school diploma while also working toward a college degree or certificate. The program is part of the [Gateway to College National Network](#), a national dropout recovery model that operates in colleges in 21 states.

The visit began with an introduction from Andy Dorsey, President of FRCC. Dorsey, who had a key role in bringing Gateway to College to FRCC, explained that implementing a program that works for students is a constant learning process. FRCC has been at the forefront of the Gateway to College movement, serving as a great example of successful implementation of the model.

Alicia Taylor, Program Director, explained that the mature college environment of the program is more conducive to success for their students. The foundational semester focuses on filling gaps in academics, strengthening social and emotional skills, and working with their assigned Resource Specialist to get the appropriate services and supports they need to be successful. Resource Specialists act as case managers and provide academic advising and referrals to various resources. Janette Walters, Executive Director of Schools in Adams 12 School District, provided a district perspective underscoring the value of high-quality alternative options for students who have not been successful in traditional district schools.

Following conversations with school administrators, eight students shared their stories and experiences with the Gateway program. Many of the students struggled in their previous schools due to lack of personalized attention, bullying, and family or home issues that detracted from their ability to learn. Students were referred to Gateway by parents, managers at work, friends, and school district staff. These students articulated that Gateway provides wraparound services, supportive staff, and an environment where their peers care about their education and want them to succeed.

### **School Visit: Colorado High School Charter (CHSC) at Colorado Construction Institute (CCI)**

The next school visit was to [Colorado High School Charter's](#) Globeville, Elyria, and Swansea ("GES") campus at the [Colorado Construction Institute \(CCI\)](#). CHSC offers a supportive school environment and tailored curricula for students under the age of 21 who have struggled personally or academically in a conventional high school setting. CHSC operates on six-week blocks, totaling six semesters, allowing frequent enrollment of new students, and opportunity for credit recovery and student feedback. The GES campus opened this year in response to CHSC's unprecedented growth. The Globeville, Elyria, and Swansea neighborhoods are separated geographically from the rest of Denver by highways and rail lines, creating both education and food deserts. Through CHSC's partnerships with GrowHaus (see below) and CCI, students have the ability to engage in project-based learning while also contributing to their community. Since the GES campus is at CCI, in addition to their core academic courses students can participate in classes like wood technology, welding and manufacturing. Through concurrent enrollment, students can take classes while also working a part-time job or take part in apprenticeship programs. Students graduate earning a diploma and 100% of seniors graduate with a postsecondary plan and acceptance into at least one postsecondary institution. Through the various opportunities that CHSC provides, students also graduate with career-relevant knowledge and skills.

The visit began with introductions from Clark Callahan, Executive Principal of Colorado High School Charter, and Kaleen Barnett, Principal at the GES Campus. Callahan and Barnett shared the key strategies that resulted in CHSC moving from "accredited and on priority watch" to "meets expectations" in the span of three years in the school performance framework rubric for Alternative Education Campuses (AECs), after five years of being on the State's accountability clock. These strategies included transitioning out ineffective teachers, implementing a robust teacher feedback and evaluation model, significantly increasing opportunities for concurrent enrollment, increasing time in math and English, and offering increased instruction and support in ACT preparation. Additionally, CHSC contracted with Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC), a non-profit organization dedicated to reducing student dropout rates in Colorado, which expanded their staff so that each student could be assigned a Student Advocate. Student Advocates support students with both in- and out-of-school issues, including attendance, student engagement, and referral to community resources. CYC also began collecting and analyzing student attendance data as part of their partnership with CHSC in order to better inform school staff of trends and how to best serve their students.

Four students shared their experiences at the school. Similar to students at the Gateway program, two students spoke of the staff at CHSC as integral to their success. Students also highlighted how project-based learning has allowed them to take on leadership roles, develop public speaking skills, and recognize their strengths and passions.

### **Debrief Session at GrowHaus**

Following a tour of the CHSC facilities, the group visited [GrowHaus](#), an indoor farm, food market, and education center. Executive Director, Isabel Martinez, explained the critical role GrowHaus plays in providing healthy food options to CHSC students and the surrounding community. Through work opportunities and coursework, students are exposed to the fields of hydroponics, aquaponics, horticultural resource management, and food production and distribution.

During the debrief, the group discussed key themes and questions from the tour thus far. The close and supportive relationships between students and school staff and the personalized learning that these alternative spaces allowed were integral to the success of their student populations, many of whom had experienced personal challenges and barriers to academic success in a traditional school environment. Considering this, participants questioned the policy and practice models that can facilitate supportive and effective schools, and produce instruction and curriculum that prepares students for college and careers. The group noted the importance of alternative settings as places of innovation, and recognized the need for networks of support and mentorship for alternative education staff and administrators to communicate with one another and share best practices.

### **Presentation: District Leaders Developing Structured, Supported Pathways for Students**

*Patricia Quinones, Assistant Superintendent of Innovation, St. Vrain Valley School District*

*Diane Lauer, Assistant Superintendent of Priority Programs and Academic Support, St. Vrain Valley School District*

*Janet Laning-Krug, Student Assistance Coordinator, Douglas County School District, Founder and Coordinator, DC Student Support Center*

This panel offered two diverse perspectives on how districts in Colorado are creating pathways for students. [St. Vrain Valley School District](#) contains approximately 32,000 students, across 411 geographically diverse square miles, serving 36% students of color. Seven years ago more students were leaving St. Vrain Valley School District than entering and new charters were opening every year. Diane Lauer, Assistant Superintendent of Priority Programs and Academic Support, shared how the district shifted its focus to be more market driven, creating different types of schools and programs that would attract children and families back to the district. Additionally, although St. Vrain has only one school with an official AEC designation, the district has made it a priority to bring alternative and innovative practices to all their traditional schools in efforts to effectively support all students. Federal grant funding and strong community and business partnerships have been integral to the district's success over the past decade.

Patricia Quinones, Assistant Superintendent of Innovation in St. Vrain, described how the district is providing a STEM pathway for their students. All students grades K-12 in the Skyline High School feeder pattern have accessibility to the [Innovation Center](#). With a 2012 Race to the Top grant, St. Vrain created the Center, a space in which student can apply STEM knowledge through hands-on projects. Through partnerships with local businesses students can interact with STEM professionals and develop products such as apps, websites, electronics and more. Partnerships with colleges and universities have provided pathways to postsecondary education in STEM, like the district partnership with University of Colorado

Boulder that allows students who graduate Skyline High School with a STEM certification the opportunity to earn guaranteed admission to CU's School of Applied Sciences.

Janet Laning-Krug shared her perspective on [Douglas County School District](#), as well as her experience as founder and coordinator of the [Douglas County \(DC\) Student Support Center](#). Douglas County serves 68,000 students across 900 square miles. The DC Support Center is a voluntary 10-12 week comprehensive credit retrieval and transition program for those who have been expelled or are at risk of expulsion due to behavior, truancy, and/or substance abuse issues. Students enrolled in the program receive instruction by certified teachers and social workers in areas like character education and social skills, work on academic credit retrieval through online classes, direct instruction, and afternoon tutoring labs, engage in career education, and receive an average of eight hours of counseling per week. The Center received a \$1.4 million grant at its inception, and through collection of data were able to demonstrate the cost-benefit analysis of the Center's work. The Center is currently exploring demographic trends to better inform equitable discipline policies. Laning-Krug shared the foundation of restorative justice that guides their work, and the importance of having all staff trained in how to provide trauma-informed care. Outside research found that students who attend the Center have shown a 58% increase in academic achievement, a 79% increase in attendance, and a 79% increase in family involvement and cohesion.

To conclude the presentation, all three panelists emphasized the importance of policies that are reflective of the needs of the most vulnerable students. To continue supporting all students at the district level, panelists mentioned the need for dialogue and conversation amongst district leaders and policymakers, for attention to smaller projects and proposals like increasing capacity for school counselors, and attention to the effects of privatization and gentrification in the surrounding Denver area.

**Presentation: Colorado's Approach to Accountability for Alternative Education Campuses**

*Jessica Knevals, Accountability and Policy Principal Consultant, Accountability, Performance, and Support Division Colorado Department of Education*

*Melissa "B" Sanders, AEC and Accountability Senior Consultant, Accountability, Performance and Support Division Colorado Department of Education*

*Erin Loften, Professional Development Coordinator, Improvement Planning Unit, Colorado Department of Education*

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*Note: Please see Appendix B for a snapshot of AECs in Colorado, including accountability for AECs. This snapshot can also be found [here](#).*

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With a foundational understanding of state, local, and private sector education work in Colorado, the final day of the study tour focused more specifically on accountability, particularly for alternative education settings. Knevals began her [presentation](#) by describing the definition that Colorado has developed for AECs. As of SY 2016-2017, Colorado had 91 AECs, comprising 4.8% of all schools in the state. Outlined in [C.R.S 22-6-604.5](#) in 2002 and continuously revised, AECs must meet various criteria, including the requirement that 90% of their student population must be high-risk students. According to the legislation, high-risk students are those who meet one or more of fifteen indicators/conditions, including students with a history of child abuse or neglect, students who are parenting or pregnant, students experiencing homelessness, or students with an IEP. In 2009, [The Colorado Education Accountability Act \(S.B. 09-163\)](#) determined that AECs were no longer exempt from accountability, and in the years following the state,

through workgroups with a range of stakeholders, created a school performance framework (SPF) for AECs with additional optional measures. This legislative foundation continued with the creation of an [AEC workgroup](#), a group of stakeholders that provide recommendations to the commissioner, legislators, and state board members. Currently the [workgroup](#) is investigating the current weighting system and measures of accountability for AECs.

Sanders offered her data expertise to further set the context for the population that AECs serve. In Colorado, AECs serve 2% of the total student population. Approximately 24% of AECs are charters, and 76% are non-charters, across 91 total schools. Those students are disproportionality students of color, students on IEPs, and English Language Learners (ELL). AECs have an additional required accountability indicator of student engagement, which includes average daily attendance rates and truancy rates, and weightings of measures are slightly different from traditional schools to account for the high-risk population of students served. Due to Colorado's nature of local control and the flexibility offered to AECs, districts have a significant amount of autonomy in deciding measures of accountability and requirements for graduation. In addition to state-required measures in each accountability indicator, schools can submit optional measures based on local data.

Loften provided an overview of the [Unified Improvement Planning \(UIP\)](#) process in Colorado. Lofton shared that UIP is about the alignment of accountability into a "single plan," a common form of documentation for schools, a process that allows for transparency across multiple stakeholders, and a way to identify and promote best practices and provide support to schools that need it. Through the UIP process, CDE compiles performance, demographic, process and perception/self-assessment data to analyze trends, measures, and inform strategies for school improvement. It is important to note that CDE, schools and districts also use this data to identify the root causes of struggling schools, and to develop and implement improvement strategies.

### **School Visit: Futures Academy**

The final school visit was to [Futures Academy](#), an alternative program that functions in partnership with Aurora Public Schools (APS) and Colorado Youth for a Change (CYC). Futures Academy provides students with the resources, guidance, and academic instruction that allow them to earn college credits, technical certifications, a GED, or any combination of the three. Students have the opportunity for concurrent enrollment at Pickens Technical College and/or the Community College of Aurora. Futures Academy serves approximately 300 students ages 17-21 who are interested in continuing their education and pursuing postsecondary options, but have too few credits for a traditional high school diploma. Students hear about Futures Academy through referrals, as well as targeted outreach to students that administrators know have dropped out of their traditional high school. Futures Academy uses a competency-based model for teaching and learning. Staff take into consideration learning targets for the GED and Accuplacer tests and speak with professors at local colleges about the skills necessary for college level work.

Joy Smith, Principal of Futures Academy, highlighted the great partnerships that have contributed to the program's success. APS provides Futures Academy with special education consultants, Medicaid and McKinney-Vento liaisons, nurses, as well as free professional development for their teachers and parenting resources for students. Additionally, partnerships with the community and technical colleges are integral to students' attainment of postsecondary credentials. Other partners include resource providers, correctional officers and advocates, and mental health providers that provide services for students as well as training in trauma-informed care for staff.

The presentation by Futures Academy staff, as well as a student panel, illuminated the reasons for which Futures has been successful at providing their students with a pathway to a postsecondary credential. Futures Academy staff create a positive school culture through affirmative language, restorative justice practices, and professional development for staff that focuses on mindfulness, trauma-informed care, and multiculturalism. Similar to the two other school visits, the supportive staff willing to listen free of judgment and a strong sense of community were mentioned as key to students' success in the program.

Although Futures Academy is not a school that "hits the numbers" in a traditional accountability sense, Mary Zanotti, Executive Director of Colorado Youth for a Change, emphasized that the program is what is best for students. While students that complete school at Futures Academy are technically considered completers, which is essentially viewed as a dropout under the federal government definition of a high school graduate, AYPF challenged participants to consider the success stories of the students at Futures Academy and think about how their states can be creative in their development of pathways for students.

### **Presentation and Debrief: Accountability for Alternative Education Under ESSA**

*Melissa "B" Sanders, AEC and Accountability Senior Consultant, Accountability, Performance and Support Division Colorado Department of Education*

*Carinne Deeds, Policy Associate, American Youth Policy Forum*

To conclude the study tour, Carinne Deeds, Policy Associate at AYPF, and B Sanders of the Colorado Department of Education, provided insight and guidance regarding accountability for alternative education settings under the Every Student Succeeds Act (ESSA). Deeds and Sanders shared three key elements of the legislation that give states opportunities and flexibility to support the students they serve. First, states can have separate systems of accountability and differentiated interventions for alternative settings. Second, the law does not explicitly state that states cannot have different measures for their alternative education settings, and states may weight measures differently for alternative settings. Third, whether or not states create a separate system for alternative education settings, states may take advantage of the opportunities within the measures themselves to better reflect the needs and progress of students in alternative settings. For example, states can utilize the "fifth" or "non-academic" indicator, can use extended year graduation rates, and can place a greater emphasis on growth over proficiency. In Colorado, CDE is not trying to create an additional or separate federal accountability system, but rather fit their ESSA state plan into the robust alternative accountability system that already exists. Since participants were uncertain of the regulations that exist under the new Trump administration, AYPF advised that states look to the law itself. AYPF also provided suggestions of [federal resources and opportunities](#) that states may consider.

### **Final Reflections and Next Steps**

The study tour illustrated the importance of creating high-quality educational pathways for all students, including alternative education settings. Colorado's efforts to prepare all students for postsecondary education and the workforce, even those at the highest risk, are built on a foundation of strong leadership, a shared commitment to vulnerable youth, and effective cross-sector collaboration. High-quality alternative education settings do not always look the same, but as the visits demonstrated, there are common elements critical to success, including a personalized learning approach, student empowerment, supportive relationships, and a commitment to continuous improvement. Colorado is a testament to the value of prioritizing and addressing the needs of the most vulnerable students to share and inform how to better educate all students. Participants left the tour grappling with how to proceed with their ESSA plans inclusive of the needs of alternative education settings and create strategies, systems, and policies within their state to better support all students.

## APPENDIX A: Denver-Area School Descriptions

### Gateway to College at Front Range Community College

[Gateway to College](#) is a national dropout recovery model that operates in 41 colleges in 21 states across the United States, funded through contributions from foundations, institutions, companies and individuals. In 2008, the Westminster Campus of Front Range Community College (FRCC) received a three year grant to become the first site in Colorado to become part of the Gateway to College Network. Now, the college and each school district partner and use per pupil operating revenue and college funds to pay for the programming (GTC FRCC went off grant in 2011). [Gateway to College FRCC](#) serves youth ages 16-20 years old, who have dropped out, are at-risk of dropping out, or are far behind in credits for their grade level. For admissions, students must be reading English at an 8<sup>th</sup> grade level or higher, and be from the Mapleton 1, Adams 12, Brighton 27J, Westminster or Jefferson County Public Schools. Students earn their high school diploma and college credits, allowing for progression towards a certificate, Associate degree, or transferable credits. The students who graduated in 2014, 2015, and 2016 earned 26.5 college credits on average. Gateway to College covers the cost of college tuition and books for up to 12 credits, and students are only required to pay for student fees (approximately \$250 per semester), with the exception of students who qualify for free and reduced lunch. Students typically are in the program for one or two years, and may remain in the program until they earn their high school diploma or turn 21. Approximately 72% of the 2013-14 cohort graduated in three years. As of September 2016, FRCC Gateway to College and its partners have graduated 290 students. Of GTC graduates, approximately 60% have enrolled in a postsecondary institution, 52% of which matriculate to FRCC and 8% of which transfer to another college. To support the success of each student, the program assigns every student a Resource Specialist who acts as a case manager and provides guidance with academic advising and referrals to various resources. During their first term, students take a series of foundational (developmental education) courses of reading, writing, math, and a class focused on college success skills and career development. Students determine the appropriate courses to take with their Resource Specialist based on their educational plan and goals, and transition to college courses following the foundational term.

### Colorado High School Charter (CHSC) at Colorado Construction Institute

[CHSC](#) is a small, supportive environment for students who have struggled personally or academically in the conventional high school setting. CHSC serves high school students under the age of 21. CHSC is a Denver Public School Charter, follows the standards of the Colorado Department of Education, and students receive a high school diploma upon graduation. One hundred percent of CHSC seniors graduate with a postsecondary plan and are accepted into at least one postsecondary institution. In the 2015-16 school year, the school had a total of 254 students, in which 64% of students identified as Hispanic, 22% as Black, approximately 9% as white, and 89% of students qualified for free and reduced lunch. To allow the opportunity for frequent feedback, credit recovery, and enrollment of new students, CHSC operates on six-week blocks totaling six semesters from mid-August through the end of May. Each semester, there are four essential courses: Math, Language Arts, Science and Social Studies, as well as two elective classes – one focused on everyday math skills and another on social and emotional skill development. Students have access to counseling services at CHSC that support students and their families with personal and social development, academic advisement, and career/postsecondary planning, as well as Student Advocates (AmeriCorps members through [Colorado Youth for Change](#)). Student Advocates support students with both in- and out-of-school issues, including attendance, course passage, student engagement, and referral to community resources. One of CHSC's two campuses, the GES Campus, is on

site with the [Colorado Construction Institute \(CCI\)](#). CCI is a partner of CHSC, providing students the opportunity to take part in apprenticeship programs. CCI is a non-profit training organization that provides both pre-apprentice and apprenticeship programs for youth and unemployed/underemployed adults, as well as [educational programing](#) to create pathways for students in the construction industry. In the span of three years CHSC moved from “accredited and on priority watch” to “meets expectations” on the school performance framework rubric for AECs, after five years of being on the State’s accountability clock, as a result of several key strategies. These strategies included transitioning out ineffective teachers, implementing a robust teacher feedback and evaluation model, significantly increasing opportunities for concurrent enrollment, increasing time in math and English, offering increased instruction and support in ACT preparation, and contracting with Colorado Youth for a Change. During this time attendance increased from 82% to 87%, the dropout rate decreased from 17% to 4%, and ACT scores increased from 1 point on the SPF to 7.

### **Futures Academy**

Through a partnership with [Colorado Youth for a Change \(CYC\)](#) and Aurora Public Schools, [Futures Academy](#) provides students with the resources, guidance, and academic instruction that allow them to earn college credits (up to an Associate’s degree), technical certifications, a GED, or any combination of the three. Each year, Futures serves approximately 300 students ages 17-21 who are interested in continuing their education and pursuing post-secondary opportunities but have too few credits to earn a traditional high school diploma. Targeted case management provided by student advisors enables wrap-around support for each student. Student advisors help students overcome and remove barriers to academic and personal success by accessing community resources and connecting students with external partners. Teachers provide direct classroom instruction using a competency-based approach to teaching and learning that enables students to prepare for the GED, Accuplacer, college-level coursework, and career expectations. Futures has developed a strong post-secondary culture and works to re-engage students by offering forward movement in their educational goals through concurrent enrollment at Pickens Technical College and/or the Community College of Aurora. In the 2015-2016 school year, 18 students earned credits at CCA, and 35 students successfully completed one or more semesters toward a certificate at Pickens Technical College. Due to the concurrent enrollment model and the age range of Futures students, GED completion varies from year to year in response to students’ postsecondary pathways. In 2015-2016, 47 students completed the GED, and 58 students completed one or more subject tests. At present, 18 students are enrolled in courses at CCA, and 30 students are enrolled in technical certification programs at Pickens. In May 2017, three students will obtain their Associate’s degrees as a result of these partnerships; all three will also transfer to four-year universities in the fall.

## APPENDIX B: Accountability for Alternative Education in Colorado

In Colorado, a foundation of legislation and strong state leadership has allowed the Colorado Department of Education (CDE) to support at-risk students in a multitude of ways. Since 2002, the state has supported the development of a robust set of high quality educational settings to ensure that students' needs are met in all educational settings, including alternative education campuses (AECs).

### DEFINITION OF ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CAMPUSES

Through legislation, Colorado has defined alternative education campuses (AECs) as those who have a specialized mission, who have nontraditional methods of instruction delivery, who serve students with severe limitations, and whose student population is comprised of at least 90% "high-risk" students. According to [C.R.S 22-6-604.5](#), high-risk students are those who meet one or more of fifteen conditions:

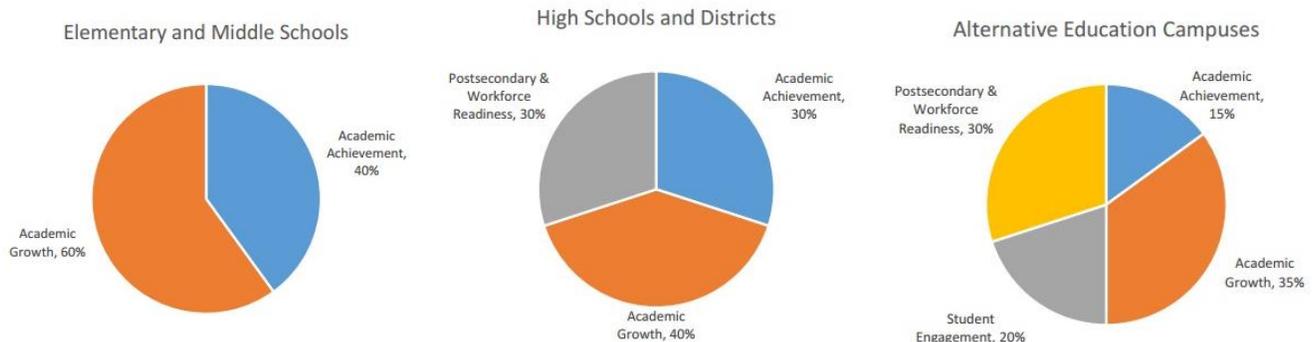
- Juvenile delinquent
- Dropped out of school
- Expelled from school
- History of personal drug or alcohol use
- History of personal street gang involvement
- History of child abuse or neglect/foster care
- Has a parent or guardian in prison
- Has an IEP
- Family history of domestic violence
- Repeated school suspensions
- Pregnant or parenting
- Migrant child
- Homeless child
- History of serious psychiatric or behavioral disorder
- Over-age/under-credited

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AS OF SY 2016-2017, COLORADO HAS 91 AECS, COMPRISING 4.8% OF ALL SCHOOLS IN COLORADO. AECS SERVE 2% OF THE TOTAL STUDENT POPULATION IN THE STATE.

### ACCOUNTABILITY MEASURES FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CAMPUSES

AECs and traditional high schools have three common indicators: Academic Achievement, Academic Growth, and Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness. AECs have an additional required measure of student engagement, and weightings of measures are slightly different from traditional schools to account for the high-risk population of students served.

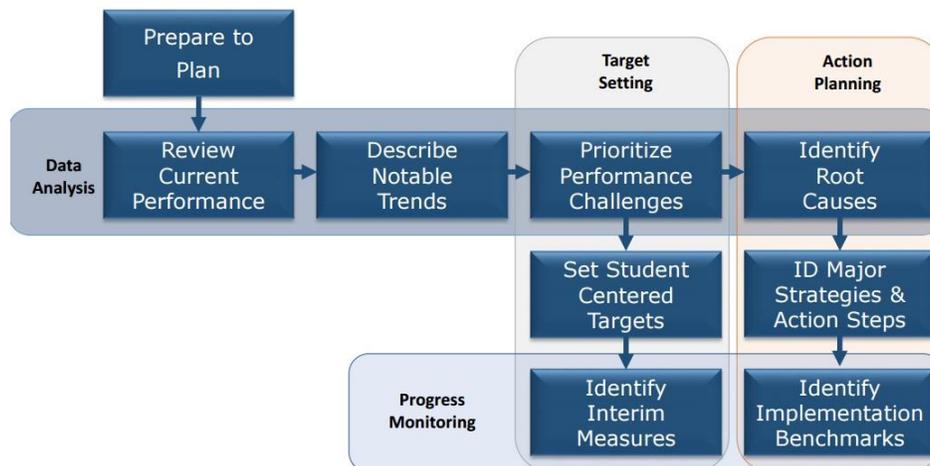


Due to Colorado’s nature of local control, districts have the option to select from additional accountability measures for their AECs (see chart below).

Performance Indicator	Weight		State-Required Measures and Metrics	Optional Measures and Metrics
	E/MS	HS		
Academic Achievement	20%	15%	PARCC Mean scale score of students for English Language Arts, Math, Science	NWEA MAP, Scantron, Acuity, Galileo, Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), STAR, and/or Accuplacer
Academic Growth	50%	35%	CMAS/PARCC median growth percentiles in English Language Arts and Math	NWEA MAP, Scantron, Acuity, Galileo, Wide Range Achievement Test (WRAT), Test for Adult Basic Education (TABE), ACCESS, STAR, and/or Accuplacer
Student Engagement	30%	20%	1. Attendance rate 2. Truancy rate	1. Student Re-engagement, 2. Returning students, 3. Socio-Emotional or Psychological Adjustment
Postsecondary & Workforce Readiness	N/A	30%	1. Completion rate (best of 4, 5, 6, or 7 year rate) 2. Dropout rate 3. Colorado ACT score (average)	1. Credit/course completion, 2. Workforce Readiness, 3. Post-Completion Success, 4. Successful transition (for non-degree granting schools only), 5. Graduation rate

### CONTINUOUS IMPROVEMENT FOR ALTERNATIVE EDUCATION CAMPUSES

According to the AEC School Performance Framework, based on the indicators above, all schools receive a plan type rating: 1) performance, 2) improvement, 3) priority improvement, and 4) turnaround. All schools, including AECs, then go through the Unified Improvement Planning process (pictured below), through which CDE compiles performance, demographic, process and perception/self-assessment data to analyze trends, measures, and inform strategies for school improvement. This information is also used to identify the root causes of poor school performance, and to develop and implement improvement strategies.



ACCORDING TO SB 09-163, IF A SCHOOL IS ON A PRIORITY IMPROVEMENT PLAN OR TURNAROUND PLAN FOR FIVE CONSECUTIVE YEARS, THE STATE BOARD MUST RECOMMEND THAT THE SCHOOL’S DISTRICT OR THE INSTITUTE TAKE ONE OF SEVERAL ACTIONS SPECIFIED IN STATUTE.

*Note: All data and figures in this document are from the Colorado Department of Education.*